

The Fall 363

Chapter 363: Stasis

Zac stepped through the Port Atwood teleporter and immediately rushed toward the government buildings. After he left under the guise of darkness he had been rushing without sleep for almost three days. Without adjusting his speed to the slow-moving army he was able to cover ground quite a bit faster, but he did take a circuitous route to keep a lookout for any threats lurking ahead of the army.

Luckily there was nothing apart from the occasional beast pack, nothing that would prove to be more than a small training excursion for the Port Atwood army by this point. His relief over the fact that his people were out of the woods was unfortunately overshadowed by the constant worry over whether he would find Alea waiting for him or if he would find a gravestone with her name on it.

"She is alive," Adran immediately said when he saw Zac enter his office. "Calrin and the Tal-Eladar Healer has moved her to the valley with the Tree of Ascension. The energy is denser over there and the tree seems to bring her comfort."

"Anything important that's happened since I was gone?" Zac asked.

"Nothing major that can't wait," Adran said with a shake of his head, allowing Zac to head out without worries.

He immediately set out for the restricted area containing the valley hidden between the four mountain peaks. It had been a while since he last was here, and the area had largely recovered from being drained of energy then poisoned during the battle for the Fruit of Ascension. New vegetation was sprouting up everywhere, though Zac was a bit confused when he looked at them.

It almost felt as though Zac was having a hallucination as he walked among the unfamiliar flora. The plants and trees were not of species he had seen before, most of them donning various bright colors. The only answer Zac could find was that the poisoned Tree of Ascension had caused a chain of mutations in the area, making the vegetation toxic.

Soon enough he reached the core of the valley and immediately spotted the Sky Gnome fiddling with a Divine Crystal next to a glass display while Tylia stood next to him. Zac's heart was gripped by fear when he saw the unmoving form of Alea inside the glass case, making it seem like a coffin. But he breathed out when he noticed her taking slow breaths, and immediately walked over to Calrin's side.

"How is she?" Zac asked after greeting the two.

"She is stable for now," Tylia said as she looked down at Alea. "I'm afraid we couldn't find a solution to her fractured soul though."

"This is a Stasis Array," Calrin explained when he noticed Zac's confusion. "It is used to keep mortally wounded people alive. But it doesn't completely stop the wound from worsening."

"How long does she have?" Zac asked with a sour feeling.

"Five years at the most," Tylia said after some consideration. "But the faster you find a solution the better. If you wait too long there will be repercussions even if her soul is healed."

"Like how?" Zac asked with a frown.

"Lost memories or crippled cultivation," Tylia sighed.

Zac silently digested the information, trying to figure out what to do. His back-up plan was to get the soul-mending fruit from Yrial if he couldn't heal her any quicker, but it looked like that option was out. Alea would be long dead before he could access the Inheritance Trial again.

"How confident are you of getting your hands on an item that can heal her?" Zac asked Calrin who stood to the side.

"I'm sorry, but there is no chance," Calrin said with a shake of his head. "I only have access to a few merchants, and I only have the lowest access to their wares. On top of that, there are the restrictions put in place by the System. Even if I manage to expand our business enough to have a monopoly of all commerce on this planet I won't get enough credits to get access to people who can provide those types of pills or treasures."

"So it's impossible to find a solution on Earth?" Zac said with disappointment.

Ogras put forward the possibility of finding a cure in the Tower of Eternity, but Zac had hoped that the problem would be solved before that. It would allow him to climb the tower without worries, but it truly looked like there was no better option at this moment.

"Well... There are a few ways. You might find one in the Tower," the Sky Gnome said, echoing Ogras' idea. "Or if you manage to travel to an established Empire. Perhaps you can find an alchemist who can concoct such a pill there. But there is also the issue of cost in the short term."

"Cost?" Zac asked.

"It cost 25 million Nexus Coins a month to keep this array going," the Sky Gnome explained. "It continuously uses Divine Crystals and E-Grade Nexus Crystals."

"I'll pay for it," Zac said without hesitation.

It was a steep price that might bankrupt most forces on Earth, but Zac didn't care. Just the Beast Crystal mine alone was worth more than keeping the array running for a decade. And he would just keep getting wealthier as time passed. Besides, now was not the time to get stuck on trifling sums of money.

"Is there anything else we can do to improve her state? What about the Tree?" Zac asked, remembering Adran's words.

"We are not sure the reason for this," the Tal-Eladar hesitantly said. "Normally one's constitution and soul are two separate aspects. But the tree seems to be helping her somehow. I am not sure about her class, but staying close to it seems to have a positive effect on her. But it is not to the point that it actually heals her. "

"She is working on gaining a poison constitution," Zac said. "Can that have something to do with it?"

It was a bit of a secret, but he didn't want to hold any important information back if it might help heal her. Tylia looked a bit surprised, but not overly so.

"Gaining a constitution without having a natural aptitude is extremely hard," she said. "She must have had a lucky encounter that allowed her to take the first step at all."

"Would it help if I got something that might complete the process?" Zac asked.

"No idea, this is far beyond my knowledge. But you should know that treasures that would allow you to gain a special constitution or bloodline are even rarer than soul-mending treasures," Tylia said. "My work here is done. The young human and I are no longer needed, the array is doing the same thing we did, but better. If it is alright with you I'll return to the side of Lady Verana."

Zac nodded with a frown hearing that it might not work, but it was still worth trying in his opinion. Those kinds of treasures might be rare, but what Tylia didn't know was that Zac might have just the thing in his possession.

"That is okay," Zac nodded "I am thankful for your help, I will remember it."

"If you want to help the Tir'Emarel you just need to provide us with some of those beast crystals of yours," Tylia smiled as she walked away toward the exit of the valley.

The Sky Gnome perked up when he heard the mention of crystals and he looked at the receding form of the healer before his eyes locked onto Zac with an enamored shimmer.

"Don't look at me like that, it gives me the creeps," Zac snorted and threw out a Beast Crystal. "I found a mine full of these in the Underworld. Keep it between ourselves."

"Good quality," Calrin whistled as he went over it. "Are you keeping or selling?"

"I am low on cash at the moment. I am thinking of selling off most of these to have enough money to buy a soul-healing treasure for Alea," Zac said. "Would you be able to sell them within a week. Roughly 2 billion Nexus Coins' worth."

"No problem, Beast Crystals are always in demand. If I only have a week you'll lose a few percents though. But all that money... I am sorry to sound callous, but is it truly worth it?" the Sky Gnome said.

"You should know, cultivating as a mortal is to burn insane amounts of money. If you spend everything on your subordinates you might find yourself stuck sooner or later."

"It's worth it. She has saved my life on multiple occasions, how can I not spend some money to help her back? Besides, don't I have you to recoup my losses?" Zac said with a smile. "Speaking of that, how much have you earned lately? It's been some time since the last payout."

The Sky Gnome looked a bit queasy when speaking about paying dividends, but he sighed after throwing the sleeping poison mistress a glance.

"Our income has been quite impressive lately," Calrin said. "You have roughly 1.6 Billion Nexus Coins in Thayer Consortia's books. You shouldn't expect this kind of income for a while though. We have made extraordinary profits by unloading our mountains of gear all across the planet and looting the towns left by the Invaders."

"That is amazing work," Zac said, shocked by the number.

He would have thought that the sky gnome would have been able to gather a few hundred million Nexus Coins at most, but Calrin had clearly been able to accumulate massive wealth from the Incursions they closed above ground. The Sky Gnome had been in charge of gathering everything of value in those places since Zac lacked the man-power to do it himself at the moment.

“That’s not all. Your actual wealth is far higher. I took over management of the stores in the underworld, but most of the mines, towns, and hidden wealth went to you,” the Sky Gnome continued. “I believe you would be able to gain at least a billion Nexus Coins if we just sold all the stocked-up metals to the System. And finally, there are the town coffers of Port Atwood.”

“How much do I have there?” Zac asked curiously.

“No idea,” Calrin said with some annoyance. “The floating eye controls those assets, and she’s keeping me at bay.”

Zac nodded in understanding, pleasantly surprised by the situation. He had felt like a pauper after handing over most of his Nexus Coins to keep Alea Stable, but his assets were quite a bit above his expectation.

Between the Consortia, His underworld Assets, and the Beast Crystal mine he was almost at 5 billion Nexus Coin in liquid assets. It was a huge amount of wealth for someone in the F-Grade, and it should be enough to buy a high-grade Soul Mending Treasure with money to spare. Just hearing that number was like having a weight lifting from his shoulders, but the funds were only half the problem.

He actually needed to find a treasure to buy as well, and there were no guarantees he would find it when visiting the Tower of Eternity. So he needed some back-up plans as well.

“Have you heard of the [Primordial Breath Amanita]?” Zac asked.

“Huh? Amanita? A mushroom?” the Sky Gnome muttered with a slight frown before taking out a huge book from his Cosmos Sack. “Let’s see.”

It was one of the binders he had used to identify the treasures Zac brought with him from the hunt, and this one seemed to be centered on various subterranean treasures.

“Here it is, Primordial Breath Amanita. A treasure that can help evolve bloodlines and constitutions. Extremely poisonous to ingest without proper preparation, but it releases a harmless gas that gives some of its benefits. Very beneficial to plant in Cultivation Chambers,” Calrin read out loud before looking up at Zac. “You found one of these things?”

Zac simply nodded in response.

“It’s a low tiered D-Grade treasure, just like this tree and the lotus you asked about some time ago,” Calrin said. “New planets are simply a breeding-ground for miraculous treasures. These things usually take thousands of years to reach maturity.”

“Do you think we can feed that thing to Alea?” Zac asked.

“No way, we would need a skilled alchemist and the knowledge to prepare it,” the Sky Gnome unhesitantly said. “But we could plant it in the area.”

“Wouldn’t it clash with the Tree of Ascension?” Zac asked.

“We would need to plant it in the underground,” the gnome nodded. “If we go deep enough it should be okay. From there we’ll create a chimney to release the gas it emits around here, allowing the girl to benefit from it.”

Zac’s eyes lit up, and he felt it was a feasible idea. He would even be able to create a secondary outlet leading to his own cultivation cave if he planned everything correctly, making his hidden cave even more magical. He didn’t have any bloodline or constitution as far as he knew, but that might simply be due to ignorance. His mom obviously wasn’t a simple character, and having a bloodline wouldn’t be anything surprising.

“Can you handle that?” Zac asked as he took out the large box containing the mushroom. “Discreetly, of course.”

“No problem,” Calrin said. “I’ll have it ready in a few days. But if you decide to harvest it, remember to sell it at ol’ Calrin’s, ok?”

“Thank you. I’m heading to the Underworld for a week,” Zac said as he gave the sleeping Alea a final look. “It’s about time I get to work again.”