

## The Fall 454

### Chapter 454: Undercover

Jaol hurriedly nodded in response to Zac's warning as the ship schematic on the wall changed to a large array of complex schematics and diagrams. They didn't have to wait long until the sliding door opened, and a burly man stepped through, his eyes trained on Jaol who stood by the screen seemingly in deep thought.

"You better not be lying about pay-" the man said, but didn't get any further before he was on the ground twitching.

"Undress him and take away anything that he can use to warn people," Zac said.

"That's impossible. He has implants like everyone else. The moment you try to tamper with that a warning will go out," Jaol said with a shake of his head.

Zac thought for a few seconds before he took out a vial and threw over a pill to Jaol.

"Feed him this," Zac simply said.

"If he dies you will be exposed," the comms technician hesitantly said as he looked down on the pill with trepidation.

"It'll just make sure he won't wake up for a day or two," Zac explained.

A minute later Zac inspected himself in a monitor, and it felt like he was on some science fiction show as his clothing completely matched that of Jaol's. The clothes of the poor man who was now slumbering in Jaol's sleeping pod was a bit long and snug, but it was a passable fit that shouldn't arouse any attention from a casual glance.

"Let's go," Zac said as he cracked his neck. "Take me to Dr. Fried's laboratory."

"I-" Jaol said before he sighed and shook his head. "Fine, let's go. Try not to speak. If anyone asks, we're heading toward the research department because the scanning equipment has been broken by the Shard. This is actually true, but it's a low priority compared to the engines. It would have been better if I had a gift. Some might see this as me taking the chance to suck up to the doctor."

Zac nodded, feeling it wasn't a bad idea.

"What kind of gift?" Zac probed.

"Rare materials and stuff like that. Something I could pretend to have picked up on the planet we just visited and wanted to use as a bribe," Jaol thoughtfully said.

"I have a few things," Zac said before he froze as he looked down at his Spatial Ring.

He hurriedly reached for his pouch, but he breathed out in relief when he saw that all items were still there even though he wasn't inside the tower. But what did that mean? Were all his items safe? Or would the confiscation still happen the moment the trial ended? Perhaps it was even possible to cheat the System this way by sending out everything he had gained. But he obviously couldn't trust Jaol to come through and send his amassed wealth back to Earth.

Even if Zac somehow managed to make Jaol obey, did the technocrat even have the ability to follow through? They could be anywhere in the multiverse right now, and there was probably no way for some random technocrat to find his sector, let alone Earth. Zac eventually threw out a handful of random materials he hadn't figured out the use of.

"This...!" Jaol said with wide eyes as he looked at the items that emitted strong fluctuation.

"So?"

"Ah? Yes, yes," Jaol hurriedly said as he reached out and took one of the items, a piece of purple wood.

It was something that Zac picked up on the 6th floor. He had noticed that a tree survived even though Zac fought right next to it. The bark was extremely durable and was even able to resist being cut with the Fragment of the Axe twice. Strangely enough, the whole tree withered when Zac cut it down to bring with him, leaving only the plank-sized piece of lumber intact.

"A piece of wood is actually valuable among technocrats?" Zac asked curiously as he saw Jaol's excitement.

"Well, no. It is rather the unique energy signature of the material that is valuable. We can extract it and infuse it in an alloy to make a stronger material," Jaol said without taking his eyes off the piece of wood. "My preliminary reading says that it should be able to increase the durability of many alloys by some degree."

Zac shrugged and the two finally left the compartment, and they found themselves in a luxuriant hallway. It didn't feel cramped at all like how it often was with cruise liners back on Earth, but the hallway was almost ten meters wide with the occasional seats and greenery. There was even a small artificial river running along the middle, creating a soothing atmosphere. Zac wasn't there to sightsee though and they hurried toward the center of the ship.

Soon enough they reached a door that seemed to be a checkpoint between sectors, and Zac noticed how stiff Jaol looked as he waited for it to open. But the door slid open without any issue, making them both release a breath in relief as they kept going. It looked like the insignia left by Leandra really worked like some sort of universal key.

It only took a few minutes of walking for the surroundings to quickly change. Zac remembered the map he had studied, and they now were in the sector where the cabins housed over ten people each. The hallways had become a lot more cramped, and there were even missing platings and exposed wires seen at spots.

Zac was surprised at the stark contrast between different parts of the ship. Jaol's compartment and the section around it were hypermodern, with not a speck of dust in the fancy hallways.

"This looks more run-down than what I would have expected," Zac muttered with a low voice as they passed through the barracks and a large mess hall. "It's like this part will fall off at any moment."

"Well..." Jaol coughed. "We're a freelance freight-class vessel bought from an auction selling off the inventory of a defunct company. The ship itself is well over four thousand years old and long due for an overhaul. The section where I and the higher-ups live was refurbished five years ago, but this section..."

"Four thousand years?" Zac exclaimed with surprise.

A thousand years wasn't much in the world of cultivation, but he knew how quickly technology failed back on Earth. A machine holding together for a couple of decades was a nigh-miracle, and this spaceship had stayed in one piece over thousands of years and countless missions?

"Are there no teleporters on the ship?" Zac asked after they had walked a while.

They had passed through a seemingly endless number of passageways and were currently passing through what seemed to be a large mess hall. They had passed some people by now, but Zac was relieved to see that they only shot Jaol, or rather the piece of lumber in his arms, a curious glance before continuing with their business.

"There are a few for emergencies," Jaol said after a few seconds. "But we can't use them. They require a lot of energy to power to use. In other words it is a waste of money."

"Jaol!" a voice reached them from the other side of the shabby mess-hall, and Zac looked over to see a stout woman wave and walk over toward them.

"Deal with this," Zac simply said with a low voice before he looked away.

"Ah, Kerven," Jaol weakly smiled as he turned around to face the woman who curiously looked at them. "I thought you were on duty today?"

"Can't do anything until the changes stop. The thing is acting up again," the woman muttered as she curiously looked back and forth between Zac and the piece of wood in Jaol's arms. "What are you up to? Isn't this your day off?"

"I, ah... I was planning on seeing if I could pick Dr. Fried's brain about our problems. This is just a small token of my appreciation."

"Uh, huh," she said with a raised brow before she shrugged. "Well, I won't keep you up."

Zac's eyes followed her as he walked away, and some killing intent started to leak as he frowned. The splinter in his mind had woken up a few minutes ago, demanding blood to be spilled. Jaol's eyes widened in horror as he sensed the dangerous aura that Zac was leaking, and he tried dragged Zac toward the exit.

The door closed behind them and Zac took a ragged breath before he shot the technician a shot.

"Let's go," he said and started walking again.

"We're almost there," Jaol answered with a sigh.

It took them almost half an hour to reach the center of the ship, the massive ball that contained both the containment field for the Shard of Creation and Dr. Fried's temporary lab. Luckily enough they didn't meet a single guard until they reached the laboratory itself, and Zac felt the ship was a bit overly reliant on the AI and the security doors.

He couldn't be sure, but it seemed like it shouldn't be too hard for an assassin-type Cultivator like Faceless 9 to cause severe damage to a ship with as lax security as this.

However, the door leading into the lab was guarded by two men wearing some sort of tactical gear and holding some sort of energy batons. They didn't feel like real warriors to Zac, but rather security guards who were there to make sure that no one peeked at the researcher's lab without authorization.

"I am Jaol Kresson, Junior Deputy of the Communications Department. We're here to see Dr. Fried if possible to ask a few questions about how to deal with the recent disturbances from the cargo. I brought a small token of my appreciation that I think will pique the doctor's interest," Jaol said with a slimy smile as he stepped forward.

"The Doctor is out," the guard slowly said after having looked at the piece of spiritual wood for a few seconds. "Let me-"

He didn't get further though as Zac moved forward like a ghost and punched the guard straight in his face as [Everlasting] appeared from his Spatial Ring slammed into the other guard simultaneously. One of the soldiers immediately went down whereas the other one required another jab before he lay unmoving on the ground.

"Hurry," Zac said as he grabbed the two unconscious men and carried them into the laboratory.

Jaol quickly bent over and wiped a spot of blood before he followed after with a face as white as a mask. Zac guessed he hadn't seen a lot of action up-close, and the situation was getting a bit tense. He had no idea if his actions just now had caused some hidden alarm to go off, but he had acted by instinct when he saw the guard activating his communication device. Jaol looked at Zac like he was a lunatic though, and Zac started to worry that the comm's officer might do something stupid from desperation.

"Stay calm," Zac whispered. "We'll stow these two in some corner, and after I've captured Dr. Fried you're free to go."

"Yes, yes," Jaol fervently nodded. "How did you know the door to the lab would open?"

"I-" Zac said with raised brows. "Huh. I just figured it would open like all the other ones?"

Jaol's mouth opened as though he wanted to say something, but he slowly closed it again and instead helped move the two guards so that they were hidden beneath a desk in the inner part of the laboratory.

Zac fed them a double dose of his knock-out pills even if the guards were just early E-Grade at best. He didn't want them waking up any time soon even if he started to cause a ruckus when the doctor returned. However, because he had acted so fast he had no idea where the doctor was or when he would return. He didn't dare walk around and look for Dr. Fried though as Zac wasn't meant to be here. He could be stopped at any moment, at which point the jig would be up.

He could only hope that the doctor would return to the lab soon enough. But the minutes passed as the two sat in an increasingly oppressive silence, and Zac was starting to get worried. His eyes were slowly growing bloodshot and his mind was awash with murderous thoughts.

The splinter was making itself reminded, and the effect was even worse than usual. Was it angry because of the close proximity to the Shard? Zac could only bear with it for the moment as he took out a soul crystal to try and soothe his soul.

"Your ship isn't quite what I was expecting," Zac finally grunted, grasping for some topic of conversation to distract himself. "It seems you're using a lot of old technology together with newer ones."

"Old technology? All technology is old," Jaol said, seemingly more than happy to break the silence.

"What do you mean? Don't you come up with new things and improve?" Zac said with a frown. "Isn't that the whole point of your factions?"

"Where did you hear that?" Jaol asked with confusion.

"I-" Zac said, but stopped himself when he realized he had no idea.

He had just assumed that the Technocrat factions were somewhat like Earth before the integration, constantly figuring out new things. But then again, the Technocrat faction was Billions of years old. Had they reached a point where they couldn't progress any further?