

The Fall 481

Chapter 481: The Next Step

Confusion and guilt plagued Zac's conscience about what he had just done to Alea. But the deed was done, and he couldn't stay in this secluded valley and second-guess himself forever.

The two jumped onto Zac's flying treasure, immediately setting off toward Azh'Rodum. As they flew he got an update of the situation from the demon. Ogras had returned 30 minutes ago, at which point order was mostly restored to the island. The Valkyries had discovered the jamming array that blocked out any communication and teleportation on the island and immediately deactivated it.

They were still locked out from the rest of the world, but Kenzie and the other experts were working on multiple solutions while multiple squads had set sail to look for hints of similar arrays. Even the Creators were furiously producing new vessels to replace the destroyed ones, and they had already delivered three Carracks in record speed.

They reached Azh'Rodum soon enough, and Zac was relieved to see that the miasmic clouds were mostly dispelled by this point. He saw hundreds of warriors walking through the forests in groups, likely looking for stragglers who had wandered off from the rest of the zombies. An inquiry told him that his sister and the demon generals had already returned to Port Atwood, and they took the teleporter back as well.

The scene in Port Atwood was pretty similar to the one in Azh'Rodum. The raging flames had been doused by now, but much of the southern edge of the island had been completely ruined by the wildfires. Thankfully they sat right on top of a Nexus Vain, and the dense energies would restore the greenery in a year or two.

The two walked over to the battlefield, where the bodies of the fallen cultists were still being examined for lingering threats. The few who survived Zac's onslaught had either tried to go out in a blaze of glory or were summarily executed by one of the demon armies. Zac didn't care about that, as there was no middle ground with these two forces.

He saw his sister stand at the edge of the battlefield as a dozen drones roved back and forth across the area. It was the same ones who had stood sentry around the Technocrat incursion, and Zac guessed she was looking for any survivors who tried to play dead. The demon generals were nowhere to be seen though, perhaps occupied elsewhere.

Of course, her search was a bit redundant considering that demon warriors and a few nauseated humans were cutting the head off every corpse just in case. It was both to kill the straggles and to avoid any corpses from rising again.

Their approach was quickly noticed, and Kenzie ran over with worry written on her face.

"What happened? Is Alea okay?" she asked the moment they appeared.

"... It's complicated," Zac sighed. "We'll talk about it later. How are things here? How are the losses?"

"Around 200 people died from the invasion, almost of them during the battles at sea before they reached our island," Kenzie said. "We mostly stayed within the arrays after they arrived though, so very few people were hurt."

Zac closed his eyes as he took a deep breath. Another 200 people dead, and that was probably just a drop in the bucket compared to the losses on the main continent. But he couldn't do anything about it, and he slowly opened his eyes and indicated for his sister to continue.

"The threat was essentially over after you arrived. We're mostly cleaning up and rebuilding by this point. We've also figured out a means of communication, old-school radio signals. A few engineers and the Ishiate tinkers have managed to strengthen the signals of old machines to the point we can communicate pretty great distances, but it's only in morse code."

"That's good," Zac nodded. "Do the ships you've sent out have these things?"

"They do, and we've actually found the missing Cultist Ship already thanks to Mr. Trang's Companion. It is sailing away from us, toward Mystic Island I think," Kenzie sighed. "We have sent over half of our remaining ships to harass it though, but it will take a few days to catch up. Ilvere is leading those ships."

"I'll deal with it," Zac said with a frown, preparing to take out his Flying Treasure again.

"Just let it be," Ogras said from the side. "Our time is limited, and we can deal with the stragglers another day. It should take them a few days to reach that Island, perhaps over a week if they're constantly under harassment. We already have elites stationed there, and they can just jump into the Mystic Realm and close the spatial tunnel, allowing us to reclaim the island at a later date."

Letting the invaders have free reign in his Archipelago went against every fiber in his body, but he knew that he didn't have much of a choice as there were bigger fish to fry.

"How long do we have until the realignment array activates?" Zac asked

"We broke a couple of key pillars before we had to stop," Kenzie answered. "I can't be sure, but we think it will take around 6 or 7 days to complete unless something changed the last day. But the sooner it's stopped the better. It's draining our planet, who knows what long-term effect that might have."

"What about the arrays blocking our Teleportation Array?" Zac asked. "I heard you were working on some sort of solution?"

"We haven't located any more arrays apart from the one on this island," Kenzie said with some helplessness. "So we are still locked out from the main continent. Worst case you can try flying over to Cogstown and use their Teleporter, it's possible it hasn't been impacted by the spatial disruption."

"That will cost us a few days though," Ogras interjected. "And we don't know the situation on the Mainland."

"Calrin and I have looked into these types of arrays since what happened to Alea and the army," Kenzie said. "I figured they might block out all teleporters around the Dead Zone after they activated the realignment array. They found a simpler solution though by just blocking this island though. But I do have something that might work."

"You do?" Zac asked with surprise.

“Blocking arrays is a standard tactic during conflicts in the multiverse,” Ogras added from the side. “It’s almost impossible to catch your targets if they just keep teleporting away. Just look at the insectoids and their war. They have tried to catch the followers of the old Redeemer for months, but they just keep teleporting away from any compromised hive.”

“So there are solutions?” Zac asked.

“It boils down to whether your or your opponent’s methods are better, and that’s why I’m not sure,” Kenzie explained. “We managed to get our hands on a [Spatial Reinforcement Array], and it should technically be able to stabilize the subspace or whatever long enough for you to teleport to the main continent.”

“That’s great!” Zac exclaimed, a weight lifted from his shoulders.

“Well, it’s just that we’re dealing with two ancient factions, their jamming arrays are probably pretty strong. I’m not sure what would happen if our array breaks apart before your jump is completed. You might be thrown out in the middle of the ocean, or you might be torn to pieces by spatial rifts.”

“...Oh,” Zac muttered. “So it’s either waste a day or two getting to Cogstown in hopes that their teleporter still works, or risk getting ripped apart?”

“Pretty much,” Kenzie said with a weak smile.

“Just teleport,” Ogras shrugged from the side. “With your luck, you’ll be just thrown out right in front of the Lich King even if the array breaks.”

Zac only snorted in response before he turned back to his sister.

"Can I do anything to help with the spatial array thing?" Zac asked. "I've gathered all kinds of items during my climb."

"I don't think so," Kenzie said. "Some treasures might be able to make the array stronger, but I don't know how to do that."

"That's fine. Where are Thea and Billy?" Zac asked. "I heard they helped out while I was gone. Oh, and where are the Tal-Eladar? I haven't seen a single one since returning."

"Billy and Thea are recuperating in a mansion next to the hospital," Kenzie said before her face scrunched up. "As for the Tal-Eladar..."

"They didn't come," the demon snorted. "I told you that you can't rely on those wily beast tamers."

"Is that true?" Zac asked with a frown as he looked over at his sister, and her face told him everything he needed to know.

"We sent a distress call, but they delayed and delayed until our Teleportation Array was blocked out," Kenzie said with some anger.

Zac knew that the Tal-Eladar just stayed behind as business partners, but he was still pretty angry that they simply chose to cower to the side when their ally was being attacked like this. This was the second

time Verana had refused to get involved with the conflicts on Earth, and it had become abundantly clear that they couldn't be relied upon for anything important.

"Well, I'm sure they'll regret their choice sooner or later," Zac finally said after a short silence, which elicited a knowing snort from Ogras.

"So what happened in the Tower of Eternity?" Kenzie asked with some worry. "Ogras said that you caused a mess, but things turned out mostly fine?"

Zac glared at the demon who just grinned back at him.

"Well, I got a pretty good result and made some allies, but I might have also made some enemies as well. I had to suddenly leave due to getting a prompt about Port Atwood being invaded, so I don't know about the fallout," Zac said as he took out the [Heaven's Secrets Array]. "More importantly, can you install this thing on my Nexus Node later when you have the time? It can help with my evolution."

"Oh?" Kenzie said with interest as she looked down at the array. "It shouldn't take too long, I'll go deal with it right now. I'm done here anyway."

Zac nodded before he left his sister to visit his two friends, and two Valkyries immediately accompanied him and helped him catch up to speed as they walked. They reached the mansion soon enough, where the guards wordlessly let him in with a bow. He indicated for the Valkyries to stay outside as he entered, and he quickly spotted where the two were recuperating with the help of [Cosmic Gaze].

A few quick steps brought him to a large bedroom on the second floor, and he entered after softly knocking at the door.

"You're back," Thea said with a weak voice from her bed facing a window looking out at a beautiful garden. "Your intelligence was incorrect. They made their move early."

"I heard," Zac sighed as he sat down next to her bedside.

He was inwardly relieved though that Thea seemed fine, with all her limbs intact. He did spot a wound on her stomach that was lit up with miasmic energies though. But it didn't look as bad as the one he got himself from Mhal, and it should heal up as long as she slowly ground down the lingering Dao with her own.

"I'm sorry," Zac said. "And thank you for helping my people while I was away. Who knows how many would have died if you weren't there."

"So? Have you dealt with everything?" Thea said as she turned to look at Zac, her piercing blue eyes staring evenly into his.

Zac was silent for a few seconds thinking it over. There was honestly more he could do to improve his current power while still in F-Grade, a lot of untapped potential as Catheya would call it. But more importantly than that, there was a burning desire that was eating him alive.

There had been a desire smoldering in his chest since the events in the valley, the desire to unleash an unprecedented level of vengeance upon the so-called Lich King for what he or his subjects did to his island and Alea. Zac's face was without expression, but a fire burned in his eyes as he looked down at Thea.

"I am evolving right now and heading toward the core of the Dead Zone the moment it's completed," Zac said, and he felt a momentum building in his body the moment he made his choice. "The Undead Incursion will be gone within a few days."