

## The Fall 518

### Chapter 518: Artifact

It was now extremely clear how big the improved Dao Field was, as it formed an almost perfect bubble around him spreading for up to 200 meters. It looked like he used a defensive treasure, though his Dao Field was more transparent.

It even had a direct defensive capability, as Zac noticed that a few falling leaves were rebuffed and pushed to the side. He didn't expect the Dao field to protect him against ultimate strikes or anything, but who knew how strong such a field could become as he progressed.

His other Dao Fields were a lot more diffuse, with his Dao Field of the Axe being a pretty much invisible field full of razor blades. Zac found it interesting how they started to move apart in how they looked, and it made him curious about how things would work at the higher grades. The time quickly passed as he meditated though, and it was soon enough time to get going.

Zac walked over to the enormous government building, and he couldn't help but notice that the sprawling structure had grown in size in between every time he visited. This time another wing had been added, built in an interesting mix of human and demon architecture that was a blend of living wood and glass.

The building was full of people even though it was still pretty early. Zac walked over to the desk and was soon led to a secluded meeting room overlooking the square, guided by an extremely flustered office clerk he didn't recognize. He guessed it was someone who had been transferred to Port Atwood recently from one of the satellite towns in the archipelago.

It still felt a bit odd to see strangers on his island, as he still somewhat considered Port Atwood the desolate place where he had spent months alone with the demons. Even when new people finally started arriving it was still in small numbers, and he could pretty much place every single face. But the last months had seen an explosion in citizens, though everyone was thoroughly screened by Adran and Abby.

Julia had already arrived, gazing at the town below through the large window with a cup of coffee in her hands.

"One of the things I like about our new lives," Zac smiled as he sat down at the conference table, pouring himself a cup. "Spiritual coffee-beans."

"Now if everything didn't want to kill us, then we would have been golden," Julia responded with a wry smile as she turned toward him.

"So? What did you learn?" Zac asked.

"It's a mess," Julia said, looking completely crestfallen. "The New World Government is beyond salvation. The cultist shapeshifters had infiltrated extremely deep, but a core section led by Thomas Fischer has actually taken up with the Dominators. A lot of the cultists were purged soon after, but I don't know if they got them all or how they were exposed."

"If we could buy that [Origin Array] to root out any aliens, then so can they," Zac shrugged. "Did you find out anything else about the cultists?"

"Not much, honestly. It feels like the shapeshifters had gone through huge lengths to obfuscate anything tangible about their origins," Julia said as she took out a tablet. "However, I did manage to find the location of both the government's spatial tunnel, along with the location of another entrance currently held by the Church of Everlasting Dao."

"Good," Zac nodded with relief. "I might have to enter from somewhere else in the future unless the spatial turbulence around ours dies down."

"You should know that at least the government's entrance is booby-trapped," Julia said. "Officially it was to protect everyone in case they needed to flee the undead, but it would work just as well against you. There are also strict checks to get inside. The whole entrance is a fortress, anyone coming by foot will be attacked without pardon."

"Pretty careful," Zac muttered. "Well, it makes sense. They're essentially the weakest group around. I still don't understand how they expect things to work out in their favor. They're only around because no one can be bothered with wiping them out."

"Well, I actually learned quite a few things about the Mystic Realm, in case you want to move on from the subject of the invaders," Julia said.

Zac slowly tapped the table in thought.

"What do you think?" he finally asked. "You haven't been with the government for a while, but you were still a part of the upper management during a time when the infiltration most likely already had started. They must have come from somewhere."

"I have a theory, but I am unable to confirm it," Julia slowly said.

Zac didn't say anything, only indicated for her to keep talking.

"The Government secured a handful of hunting grounds for our soldiers during the early stages of the integration, even before you appeared," Julia began. "We had found one place in particular, just one week's travel from Main Paris, one of the larger secondary hubs of the government. Better yet, the route to get there was pretty safe, which was key as we still hadn't set up too many teleportation arrays. The cost constant of mass teleportations was also something we had trouble affording."

"We sent soldiers to Main Paris through arrays, and then put them on cargo planes or convoys. Some would return directly to New Washington by teleportation array later, but others would stay there. There was constant traffic both the old way and through teleporters, and infiltrators could easily have used Main Paris as the point of ingress," Julia said as she showed Main Paris on a map.

"Main Paris is located in the middle of Pangea," Zac muttered. "They would have been able to travel to most major towns of Earth within a month or two even if they traveled by foot. Such a trip would be suicide for most humans, but it shouldn't have too difficult for the church."

"Exactly," Julia nodded.

"So you think the Incursion is in this forest?" Zac asked.

"Probably not. We should have found it if that was the case," Julia said with a shake of her head. "The training ground was a medium-sized forest full of Derriers, a pack animal from the Ishiate world. They are quite aggressive, but not very powerful, and there's a lot of them. Makes for perfect target practice. The forest was blocked to north and west by an inhospitable mountain range and a massive saltwater lake to the east. We came from the South. It created an enclosed area that allowed the Derriers to multiply freely.

"We mapped the forest easily, but we never managed to get past the mountain range due to extremely aggressive birds that lived there. They were hunting Derriers as well, so our soldiers mostly stayed at the southern side of the forest. But if the invaders could find a path through the mountain..." she continued.

"So they might be on the other side," Zac nodded in understanding.

"Exactly. The area on the other side of that mountain range is one of the twelve yet uncharted territories of Pangea, and my best guess of their whereabouts," she explained.

"Sounds like our best bet," Zac agreed. "I will go there to check things out as soon as I've prepared everything I need."

"Be careful, those birds in the mountain are extremely territorial. They even ripped apart a couple of our fighter jets that we sent to scout things out," Julia said.

"The more powerful they are, the better," Zac shrugged. "I could use the experience. What have you found out about the Mystic Realm? Have you found what everyone's after?"

"Thomas is keeping a lot of details close to the vest. But it's impossible to keep everything secret in this big an operation, so my contacts and I have managed to piece together some things," Julia said. "The fact that there are a lot of people who wish that they joined you instead of New Washington made my job a lot easier as well."

Zac wryly smiled in response, but he honestly wasn't all that interested in taking on a bunch of flaky diplomats from the New World Government. Especially not after hearing the disgusting stories from Emma MacHale and seeing how they mismanaged his hometown.

"Thomas Fisher seems to believe there is some sort of dimensional artifact inside the Mystic Realm that will save them not only from the cultists and Dominators, but even the Great Redeemer himself. It's this item that every force is after," Julia said, immediately dragging Zac out of his thoughts.

"Dimensional artifact?" Zac repeated with confusion. "What's that?"

"No idea. But from what I gathered it seems to be still growing in the depths of the realm. Thomas is moving a lot of his resources into the Mystic Realm, and many of the elite squads never leave any longer. Even Thomas only exits for a few hours at a time. I believe..." Julia said, gathering her thoughts.

"Yes?" Zac asked.

"It is because of this dimensional artifact. The moment it's uncovered it will temporarily destabilize the Mystic Realm, cutting off the entrances. That's why everyone's missing. The Dominators, the Cultists, the New World Government. No one wants to be caught outside. That's at least the conclusion I and my contacts reached," Julia said.

"Do you have any timeline for when that would happen?" Zac asked with worry.

If it really was true, then he needed to get going quicker than he anticipated. He absolutely couldn't be locked outside if both the Incursion Leader and the Dominators were inside the Mystic Realm. Not only would that leave the most powerful invaders unchecked, but it would also make it impossible to kill the Dominators.

He didn't know whether The Great Redeemer could find Earth while the Dominators were inside the Mystic Realm, but he didn't want to risk it. What if Void's Disciple managed to lock the Mystic Realm down completely, and simply stayed there until Voridis appeared?

"We couldn't find an exact date, but you should have at least a month. I got a hold of various orders to the military and a few departments. There are multiple projects related to the Ark World that have a delivery deadline of 36 days from now. I think the government is confident of the entrances being open until then, while the elites are already standing by in case something unexpected happens," Julia said.

"Thirty-six days," Zac muttered. "A month."

It wasn't a lot, but it was better than nothing. In fact, it might even be for the best to deal with this matter as quickly as possible. However, he knew that the number of power-ups he would be able to gain in such a short time was limited.

"What makes the government think they can actually compete for that item though?" Zac asked next, which was the most burning question in his mind. "I could simply fly over to their entrance and snatch their entrance if I wanted to, and I bet the Dominators could do the same."

"You shouldn't underestimate them," Julia said. "They control most of the old world's weaponry. Thousands of missiles and other types of explosives."

Zac made a noncommittal shrug, not feeling too threatened by something like that any longer. He would be able to push them all away with a few swings of his axe, or just move out of the way with [Loamwalker]. Or just block them with some defensive skills.

"You also shouldn't take their entrance unless you have to. They've already made it clear that multiple people can set off the booby-trap to the entrance. Stealing the entrance and jumping inside would be suicidal," Julia said.

Zac grunted with annoyance, but he had to admit it was a pretty good deterrent. He almost died the last time he entered a booby-trapped teleporter after all. If it wasn't for his sister adding a safety measure he would have been ripped apart instead of thrown out over the ocean. But would that method really work in a spatial tunnel to a mystic realm?

Where would he be thrown out if he exited mid-transportation? The void of space?

"But more importantly, they have apparently brokered an agreement with some of the forces inside the Mystic Realm," Julia added, dragging Zac out of his thoughts. "They are currently advertising it, how they have allied with multiple powerful E-Grade warriors."

"They have? What do the aliens get out of that deal?" Zac said skeptically.

"Freedom. Getting out of the Mystic Realm when this is all done," Julia said.

Zac frowned when he heard her explanation. Joining up with a bunch of strangers who were far more powerful was a recipe for disaster, something that Catheya had driven home during their talk. The government obviously had some way to restrain them though, as Earth wasn't already crawling with escapees.

Ogras had mentioned the extremely strong security measures in the research base, perhaps the government had managed to use those checkpoints to their advantage. Still. It only took one mistake to release the floodgates, at which point any agreement would be null and void. Why would a bunch of powerful E-Grade warriors bother following the orders of Thomas Fisher and the useless diplomats?

"Wait, forces plural?" Zac asked, but he suddenly remembered Ogras' description of his visit to the Mystic Realm.

He had met two peak F-Grade warriors fighting to the death, meaning they might come from opposing factions.

"There are at least five forces in the Mystic Realm, each trapped inside and in control of their own section of the research base," Julia said explained, opening a rough sketch on her tablet. "It's apparently shockingly large, like a country. But no one has access to the core region of the base as I've understood. But the restrictions are weakening inside for some reason, and everyone is looking for a path to the dimensional artifact."

Zac looked down at the sketch that looked like a hexagonal star, his eyes drawn to the 'X' marked in the center of the map. An artifact that could deal with even The Great Redeemer? He couldn't let that fall into the hands of anyone else.