

The Fall 530

Chapter 530: Incentives for Exploration

"There are two rewards? What are they?" Zac asked with anticipation.

"You could say one is for you and one is for Port Atwood. The first is a pretty interesting mobile array, called the [Spatial Gate Array]. It is a two-part array that has two functions, the first of which will allow you to teleport to Port Atwood from almost anywhere in the whole sector once every decade," Abby said.

"What? Can't I already do that as a world leader?" Zac asked with disappointment. "And without the wait time."

"Well, it's not quite that simple. Nexus Hubs requires upgrades. You might need to do multiple jumps to return if the hubs you use are too low-quality. Each jump is a risk of entering a hostile environment," Abby said. "Besides, from what I've heard your identity has become a bit sensitive in your sector."

"So?" Zac asked, still feeling a bit peeved.

"What if your identity gets exposed while traveling? The first thing that a City Lord would do is deactivating the teleportation arrays, trapping you in place," Abby said. "Not much you can do about that apart from either taking over the town or fleeing to some other force in hopes of using their teleportation array."

"This array could help you circumvent this, making you far harder to pin down. You could be stuck on a desolate planet or in the void of space itself. As long as you're not in a hidden realm you can just activate this treasure and get sent home as soon as you've infused enough energy," Abby explained.

Zac whistled in understanding. It did indeed sound indeed convenient. It would allow him to venture out to improve himself with greater peace of mind. The cultists joining hands with the undead had reminded how exposed his people were while he wasn't around. There was a limit of what one could do with the Town Shop against a powerful enemy, after all.

Once a decade was a very long cool-down, but it was enough in case of an emergency. Things usually moved pretty slowly in the multiverse. With people's lifespans being in the millennia it was unlikely that Earth would be attacked multiple times within a decade when things had stabilized.

"It is an extremely convenient array and valuable lifeline for someone who is planning on traveling the multiverse. Any outlaw or wandering cultivator would kill for something like this. You would almost become as hard to trap as a Karmic or Spatial Cultivator," Abby said. "The escape measure has various good functions as well, such as countermeasures to spatial lockdowns and tampering."

"What about the other function?" Zac asked.

"It allows you to erect a temporary Teleportation Array lasting a few minutes, even out in the wilderness," Abby said. "You need the materials for it though, and it has a downside. It's expensive. Very expensive."

"How expensive?" Zac asked with some worry.

"Five times the standard rate," Abby said.

"Doesn't that make it useless?" Zac blushed.

The reason that almost no one below the D-Grade would travel between worlds was the cost of teleportation. It wasn't like weaker cultivators didn't want to travel to Mystic Realms to gain titles and experience, but they simply couldn't afford it. Just the fees alone could ruin even a wealthy scion.

Zac was extremely wealthy for a self-made cultivator at his level, but just the prospect of teleporting to the Allbright Empire or some of the other cultivation spots he had in mind was a source of some dread. Paying five times that price would put him in the poor house. It was like taking a helicopter to go buy groceries.

"It's a bit extravagant, but it is a good option to have. It doesn't have the cool-down like the escape function of the [Spatial Gate Array], meaning you never need to worry about being stranded on some desolate planet," Abby said.

"Is the escape function as expensive?" Zac asked.

"No, that function is free. You just need to set up a base array somewhere safe," Abby explained.

Zac immediately decided he would put it in his cultivation cave, and had Abby make the arrangements. With the layers of arrays that place had become even more fortified than his compound, and he could empower the protections even further with the new arrays available in the store.

More importantly, only his sister, Abby, and Triv knew the exact location of that place, making the risk of sabotage lower. The [Spatial Gate Array] was pretty amazing all-in-all and something that he didn't even know he needed until now.

Even if the instant escape function was used up he would still be able to construct a mobile Teleportation Array. It did mean that he would need to walk around with more Nexus Coins than he anticipated, but the Auction should take care of his lack of funds soon enough. Zac wondered what this thing could be worth, and he opened his Town Shop menu to see if it was available there.

"You don't need to look. This isn't something available in the Town Shop, no matter how much of the inventory you unlock. It only contains Base Arrays. In fact, you shouldn't rely on those arrays too much. There are extremely effective Array Breakers readily available in the Multiverse for every single array in the shop," the Stargazer snickered.

"What?" Zac exclaimed. "So they're useless?"

"Well no. They might be useless against invasions of advanced enemies who have done their research about your defenses, but they work just fine against weaker foes and beasts. It's not like anyone on Earth can get their hands on those kinds of siege tools right now," Abby explained.

Zac sighed in relief, but he was still worried about the future. It felt like he was buying a door lock that everyone had a master key for. It wasn't like forces like the Underworld Council and the New World Government were the enemies he was worried about, but rather the more advanced forces that might make their way to Earth in the future in search of his secrets and wealth.

That was years away though, and he would have ample time to construct individualized defensive arrays. Kenzie might even be able to adjust the store-bought ones so that they wouldn't be so easy to break open with standardized solutions.

"Worrying me for nothing," Zac snorted. "What about the second reward?"

"Nothing as exciting, but still something of use to you. It's an upgradeable puppet army," Abby said.

"They can both defend your lands autonomously, or you can control them with an adept array master. Your sister could use them instead of those cursed items she seems to like."

"How strong are they?" Zac asked.

"There are 1000 Soldiers, each equivalent to Early E-Grade, with 3 leaders at Middle E-Grade. They should be able to keep most forces of Earth at bay for the foreseeable future," the stargazer explained.

"I haven't summoned them all yet as you need to pick a spawn Zone."

"Is that one of them behind me?" Zac asked as he pointed at the unmoving golem standing in the corner.

"Just so. I took one out to make sure I understood the reward. But now that you mention it, an Administrator without any guards is highly irregular," Abby said.

"Just keep it," Zac snorted before he considered what he could do with an additional army. "Can I bring them to the Mystic Realm?"

Pure power wouldn't cut it in the Mystic Realm judging by what he'd heard so far. Half the battle would be exploring the research base to find the Dimensional Artifact, while securing your base from the other factions. That was an endeavor that was manpower intensive, and he would feel much better about sending a bunch of puppets into the depths of the Research Lab rather than the Valkyries and his soldiers.

"No, you can consider them a defensive structure. You can send them out by themselves, though they work best in squads under the three leaders," Abby explained, dashing his hopes.

"How big an area can they guard autonomously?" Zac asked with some disappointment.

"An island of this size wouldn't be an issue," Abby said without hesitation.

Zac asked a few more questions, until he understood the function of the puppet army properly. He eventually decided to keep two of the armies in Port Atwood while sending the last one to Mystic Island to protect against any further sabotage. He could change the composition in the future though, allowing him to protect the settlements that were more important to Port Atwood.

"You said they're upgradeable? How do I upgrade them?" Zac probed.

"You will have to ask the golems over at the shipyard. The System has connected the puppet army to them, which is good news for you. Any upgrade they do will be of a much higher quality than a standardized solution," Abby said.

Zac's eyes lit up when he heard the Creators would be in charge of upgrading them. They might turn out pretty weird after Karunthel got his spider-hands on the puppets, but their offensive capabilities would

probably be extremely impressive. He had to head over there later, in either case, to see about the possibilities of upgrading the shipyard.

“One item which will freely allow me to return to Earth, another that will allow me to protect the town while I’m gone? Do you think the System is sending me a message?” Zac said as a joke after instructing Abby where to set up the puppet armies, but he was surprised to see that the Stargazer agreed without hesitation.

“Of course it is,” Abby said as matter of course. “The System wants you to become stronger, but this planet is holding you back. The best route of you becoming a powerhouse is to spread your wings, so I wouldn’t be surprised that the System calculated the most pertinent rewards to help you become stronger were those that allowed you to leave.”

Zac shrugged, not sure if he believed Abby’s explanation or not, but the gifts were indeed exactly what he needed. The [Spatial Gate Array] was especially valuable, as it would allow himself and his companions to escape certain death in many situations, and it would be useful all the way until he reached C-Grade and started traveling beyond the Zecia Sector.

Since he was already there he asked the Stargazer to update him on the state of things, but he quickly felt himself being submerged in a sea of data he didn’t understand. Abby quickly caught on and slowed down, and finally stopped narrating altogether.

“The day-to-day running of a force isn’t something the leader bothers with. Are the elders of mighty Clans or Sects busying themselves each day with diplomatic issues and crop yields? No, they are cultivating. You don’t have a younger generation to deal with this for you, but you do have me and many other promising administrators,” Abby said.

Zac knew that was true. The patriarch or sect leaders were never the most powerful people of a force, but rather something that could be considered middle management. They were powerful enough to command respect, but they only ran the day to day operations. The real decision-makers were the elders who either traveled the sector for opportunities or were secluded in cultivation in hopes of breaking through.

That wasn’t to say that those positions were useless. The sect leader did have access to most of the resources of the force, and they were in a far better position to break through in the future. Most of the grand elders of a clan had probably been the clan leader for a couple of millennia once upon a time.

This was probably also why Abby was pushing for Zac to be such a hands-off boss. She had clearly evolved since they met last time, no doubt benefitting from having almost free reins when running his force. He would have to put in some checks and balances soon though, but some pilfering of public resources was pretty much bound to happen.

Of course, there were limits to everything.

“How are criminals dealt with today?” Zac asked out of the blue.

“Thrown out of your sphere of influence or killed, depending on the severity of their crime. You don’t have any dungeon at the moment, though you might want to consider building one. They are usually an effective deterrent against criminals,” Abby said. “Your army is keeping the law at the moment.”

“Julia wants to set up a proper Law Enforcement Section for Port Atwood. What do you think about that?” Zac asked.

“Most sects and clans have some sort of Law Enforcement to keep the rabble in check,” Abby said with a bob. “How they deal with transgressions vary wildly between forces. That girl seems capable enough, but she would need someone more powerful to help enforce the laws. The leader of the Law Enforcement Hall of a Sect is usually one of the strongest cultivators around. They have to be.”

Zac nodded in agreement. Just Julia wouldn’t be enough. His first choice would be Ilvere, but he was already in charge of the Army. But on further thought, Zac felt Janos might be a pretty decent choice. He didn’t speak much, but he was as powerful as Ilvere while having a skillset extremely suited for incapacitating without killing.

He left the government building soon after and made his way back to his courtyard. The festivities in the town had only grown during his talk with Abby, but he was too tired to join in on the excitement. He found a drone mentioning that Kenzie had left for Mystic Island to work on the tunnel there. It was for the best with the cultists acting as they did.

The chance of him being able to steal one of their entrances felt slim at best, especially after the New World Government already had done so once. So he instead spent the next day in rest, working on restoring his body. The worst of his burns were healed by that point, making him look like a boiled lobster instead of a grilled chicken.

The wound from breaking open his node was healing nicely as well, though Zac had only just started redrawing his pathway. Zac guessed would need another week or so to return to 100%, but that didn’t mean he needed to sit around in his courtyard. There were a lot of things he could do, some of which he had put off for too long already.

Zac somberly left his courtyard and walked over to the teleportation array. He took a deep breath before he stepped onto the array and he appeared at the top of a small hill covered in flowers a few seconds later. It was his first time coming to this specific island, the only prison of his archipelago.

The secluded island where Hannah and David lived.