

The Fall 550

Chapter 550: Swamp

"Ten days?" Zac frowned. "Why don't we just keep going?"

The New World Government's deadline for entering the Mystic Realm was inching closer, and he definitely couldn't get caught outside when the hidden world closed its doors. Besides, wanted to be over with this bloody matter as quickly as possible.

"Our scouts returned a few hours ago. The hives are emptied, except one that is utterly destroyed. Only the weak have been left behind, just like during a migration. The number of remaining Zhix is still in the millions, but we cannot locate them. A letter of challenge was issued just an hour ago though. For the future of the Zhix," Ibtep explained.

Zac asked a bit more and he learned that the challenge was something that occasionally happened before their integration. It was essentially an all-out war between two forces that competed for resources. The survivor would claim the hive and its land, and the losers would either be killed or assimilated.

This time there would be no assimilation if the council won though, only death awaited those who chose to follow the Dominators.

"So it's one all-out war. Do you think the Dominators will be there?" Zac asked.

"It is hard to say," Nonet said with a shake of its enormous head. "No Zhix would stay behind when the challenge is issued. However, the Dominators are Zhix, yet they are not. They might not care about the precepts and enter this hidden world you have mentioned. They might even try something before then."

Zac nodded with a frown. Retaliation from the Dominators was something he had been worrying about since slaying Harbinger. He knew all-too-well just how crazy Inevitability was, and he wouldn't put it past her to go slaughter everyone in his outpost. He had been half-expecting a notification in his communication crystal while cultivating, but he had thankfully been uninterrupted the whole time.

He didn't know why, but it looked like his people were safe for now though. Void's Disciple seemed quite capable to move about across Pangea freely, and he should have attacked one of his towns by now if he had decided to act. He still decided to pull back more of his forces to the island and his private continent just in case.

The two Zhix left a few minutes later, leaving Zac to ponder his next move. The break was honestly a relief to Zac, as he was not completely ready to meet another one of the Dominators. Fighting both of them simultaneously felt extremely risky as well, especially while Ogras was still in seclusion. The pause would give him some time to prepare his next move.

There was no way for him to prepare another Annihilation Sphere even if the battle was delayed another ten days though. The Splinter simply didn't produce enough energy for that. He would have to use some other means to deal with them instead.

The delay also threw about his plans a bit, as he needed to prepare himself for the Mystic Realm as well. He wanted to enter the Mystic Realm within two weeks if possible, as that would still give him some time to maneuver even if his sister proved unable to force open the broken pathway.

Zac hadn't heard any updates from his sister for a while, and he couldn't sit around any longer. He walked over to his own array and teleported over to Mystic Island. He needed to see how things were going.

It was quite some time since Zac was here last, but not much had changed. The base camp was a bit desolate though, as most of the normal staff was stuck on the other side of the spatial tunnel. Now it was mostly demons and Valkyries staying here to protect Kenzie and a few scientists. A large number of the Sentry Golems were probably off wandering the island as well, making sure no one tried sneaking up on the camp.

"Oh, you're here?" Kenzie said with surprise as Zac entered her workshop. "Is the war over?"

"It's on hold for ten days," Zac smiled as he looked around. "How're things going here?"

"It's slow," Kenzie sighed. "The tunnel is still a mess, that bomb the zealots set up really did a number on space itself. The turbulence got better a lot faster in the beginning, but it has been slowing down lately. I'm not sure it will clear up before the deadline you set."

The deadline Zac set was ten days before the government. Part of it was simply a precaution, but there was another important reason for the haste.

The other forces were frantically searching the Mystic Realm at this very moment and he was already pretty far behind. He couldn't just enter the last minute and expect everything to go his way. He definitely had a hidden ace with his familiar connection to the Mystic Realm along with his sister and Jeeves, but he wouldn't take anything for granted.

In a perfect world, he would already have started to explore the mysterious research base, but he wasn't ready to risk it all by trying to sneak into the New World Government's entrance. Seizing it was even riskier as there were probably spies from both the cultists and the Dominators ready to blow up the spatial tunnel at moment's notice.

"Can you crack it open early?" Zac asked.

"We can give it a try, but if we fail it will make things a lot worse," Kenzie said. "If we wait another week or two our chances will be better."

Zac slowly thought it over, before he nodded in agreement.

"I want to try it in twelve days, after the battle is dealt with." Zac eventually decided. "If things fall apart I'll just have to try my luck by sneaking inside some other way."

"You know you can just talk with the government officials, right?" Kenzie said.

"If they were ready to work together they would have contacted us long ago," Zac said with a shake of his head. "They've had ample chances to extend an olive branch since I closed the last Incursion. Even before then."

“Fine,” Kenzie shrugged. “But remember to not kill a bunch of people willy-nilly.”

“I know,” Zac agreed.

Not killing weaklings was an unwritten rule of the multiverse, and something Zac had to start taking note of now that he was on a higher grade than the rest of Earth. It was widely considered extremely vile to wantonly slaughtering the weak, almost like killing innocent puppies. Of course, if that was the only problem the blood-drenched cultivators of the multiverse wouldn't have cared.

But there were a lot of signs pointing toward the fact that killing substantially weaker people went against the will of the Heavens and that it affected one's karma negatively, almost like giving you a hidden debuff to your Luck. It wasn't something that was visible on your status screen, but through how the universe treated you.

After all, F-grade cultivators weren't useful to the System, but they represented seeds of potential. The System wouldn't care if a bunch of warriors killed each other in a war, as that might result in a few powerhouses emerging, but the mighty slaughtering substantially weaker people was another matter altogether.

The strong didn't get stronger, and a lot of potential was snuffed out as the weak got culled. It was wasting resources, and essentially working against the System. A few people dying here and there didn't really matter, but if you went too far you would draw the ire of the System, and it would start treating you like an enemy of the heavens like the Technocrats.

There were even rumors of powerful cultivators that were actively hunted by the system for their actions, who were forced to hide from the eyes of the Heavens. That wasn't something that had any relation to a small corner like the Zecia sector though, as you needed to be much more powerful for something like that to happen according to Triv.

“I'll be going away for a couple of days,” Zac eventually said. “I need to keep improving as much as possible before we enter, so I have decided to head to one of the uncharted sectors of Pangea. It's the swamp.”

“Really? The swamp?” Kenzie said with a scrunched-up nose. “That place seems pretty disgusting.”

“There's a lot of putrefaction and death in the swamp from what I understand,” Zac said. “It might provide me with some sort of inspiration. Or there might be a lot of valuable plants.”

It was the latter that was the biggest reason for Zac deciding to go. The integration of a new world led to the appearance of a bunch of valuable resources, like the Amanita and the Tree of Ascension. There were no doubt more that had appeared, but most had probably already been snatched up by the people around the world.

If there were any remaining natural treasures of that grade on earth, then they were probably hidden in the unexplored pockets. The swamp seemed particularly dangerous, and Zac believed that no one should have properly explored its inner areas. Finding some valuable treasure was his last chance at gaining another power up before heading into the Mystic Realm, and he could probably burst open another node while looking around.

It was a risky move considering that Void's Disciple might show up with a vengeance at moment's notice, but he had the [Spatial Gate Array] now. He could set an array up in ten minutes, and his town just had to defend that long for him to return. Ten minutes should definitely be doable even against Void's Disciple with the comprehensive upgrades to the defensive Arrays of Port Atwood.

The value of a World Capital had quickly shown itself in the number of good things available in the Town Shop, and Abby and Adran had been busy squeezing as much benefit as possible out of the available arrays and fortifications.

Zac immediately turned thoughts to action as he teleported to the array closest to the swamp, leaving just a small squad of Valkyries to act as a relay in case they needed to reach him through his Communication Crystal. He actually owned a town just on the edge of the swamp, a small base that was formerly one of the incursions he had closed. It had belonged to a humanoid race that somewhat reminded Zac of the Zhix, though they looked a lot more like humans.

It was most likely one of the demi-human races of the multiverse. Humans were just too prolific, after all, and they had proven very compatible for procreation with most humanoid species. They were like blank canvases, and there were very few humanoids that didn't have a little bit of human in their genome.

What was human and what wasn't had already become blurred, but people essentially went by the race in the status screen, which was dictated by the dominant heritage. This was rarely the human side, especially not when matched against powerful races.

The ones who had controlled this former Incursion were likely the result of a mix of some insectoid race and humans a long time ago, which might have been why they were placed so close to a swamp. It made Zac's life a lot easier anyway, as he didn't have to utilize the Marshall Clan for transportation this time, exposing his plans while doing so.

He was soon flying atop his treasure above the marsh, looking down with interest. After hearing the description of the place he had first thought this might be where the Everglades ended up, but he soon realized that that wasn't exactly the case.

Zac was no botanical expert, but there were just too many unfamiliar trees and plants in the ground below for this to be a piece of Florida. At best it might have combined the wetlands with some marshes and tropical forests of the other planets, most likely the Ishiate world as it seemed to have been just one massive forest.

It had created a unique ecosystem with a forest floor that was mostly submerged like a mangrove system. However, there were smatterings of solid land with some regularity, though not quite to the point that you could freely walk on the ground.

However, the infusion of Cosmic Energy to the marshlands had helped the trees explode in size, which included their branches and roots. It had formed vast systems of bridges running along the rivers, and Zac saw one beast after another running along their length from tree to tree.

He just needed to travel above the marshland for a few minutes to realize the place was teeming with various species, just like the primordial jungle where he had spent a lot of time after dealing with the

cultists. However, if the atmosphere over by the volcano was a boisterous cacophony, then this place held a subdued silence, with animal calls only occasionally breaking through the silence.

The whole area felt like it was full of adventure and mystery, and Zac wondered if this was how the explorers of old felt when they traveled along the rivers of Mississippi or through the virgin jungles of Africa. Of course, he had the added safety net of being able to fly away, and a superhuman constitution that would protect him from most insect bites and poisons.

The place provided Zac with a sense of adventure, but more importantly it provided him with solace. The bloody scenes over the past days had left him with a feeling of heaviness that reached deep into his soul, and this was an opportunity for him to not only regain a sense of balance but even work on his skills.

Of course, if he could find some treasure while doing so, all the better.