

The Fall 570

Chapter 570: The World is Ending

The chains of [Love's Bond] slammed into the walls and floor of the research base with tremendous force, but they still barely managed to dig deep enough for Zac to propel himself forward. A swirling storm of spatial rifts was right on his tail, like a maw of a terrifying beast. If they caught up they'd both be ripped apart in an instant.

"Left!" Ogras suddenly shouted, and Zac immediately changed the course.

However, both Zac and Ogras couldn't believe what they were seeing when the spatial tears actually turned to continue the pursuit, though many of them didn't manage to pivot in time. There was no time for Zac to figure out why some dimensional rifts were seemingly alive, but the scene did give him an idea of what to do.

Zac kept turning back and forth in the endless tunnel, though he was careful to not stray too far from the pathway they came from. Each turn they managed to shake off another group of tears until there only were a handful left. A small group was manageable, so Zac stopped in his tracks and let Ogras down before he changed [Love's Bond] to its shield form.

A second later another group of scars covered the coffin's lid, but there were at least no threat any longer. They managed to escape unscathed, but a sheen of perspiration covered Zac's forehead as he looked at the demon.

"Since when did spatial tears get tracking capabilities?" he muttered, and Ogras snorted as threw Zac a scathing look.

"What did you do back then? Everything was fine, then all hell broke loose," the demon said. "By the way, you better never use that movement technique in public. I'm not sure I'd be able to survive the second-hand shame."

"It's not stupid if it works," Zac muttered. "Did you find any clues what was going on?"

"I suddenly saw you disappear into thin air, not even leaving a hint of energy behind. Thirty seconds later a bunch of spatial tears appeared before you reappeared, looking like there were a dozen Rakefiends hot in pursuit," the demon said.

Zac was surprised to hear that he had disappeared from the demon's sight, just like some of the spatial tears seemingly appeared out of nowhere. It looked like the hallways were equipped with technocrat cloaking technology just like what he encountered by the Battleroach King. That technology didn't release any energy either, at least not anything he could spot.

He still didn't know what to make of the encounter, so he retold everything he saw in the booby-trapped corridor. Of course, he didn't mention that Kenzie, or rather Jeeves, could create shields that looked a lot like the one he saw. He instead likened it to the orange shields that the Technocrat Incursion used. Ogras frowned as he listened, but he didn't immediately offer an opinion.

"What do you think?" Zac finally asked. "Did you really pass through this way before?"

"I have never heard of something like this. But it sounds like something suddenly took control of those rifts if they originally were almost static as you said. My guess is that it's a security feature. Did you notice? Not one of the tears hit the walls. They either turned to follow us or gave up to avoid a collision," Ogras explained.

"It seems like a really weird security measure though," Zac muttered. "It almost looked like the spatial tears seeped out of the Technocrat barrier like it was part of its energy source. Why make things so complicated instead of just adding some normal energy weaponry?"

"Perhaps it's not how things were originally designed," Ogras shrugged. "A powerful dimensional treasure is growing somewhere in the base. I've heard that grand treasures can affect whole planets. Perhaps Spatial Energies has somehow infiltrated whatever this place runs on."

Zac nodded in agreement. He remembered the vision of the cursed lotus in the Tower of Eternity all too well. A whole planet went insane with bloodlust because of its existence, and who knew what would happen if that giant didn't seal it before it was too late. However, the implications were clear if this really was the case.

"If the treasure is powerful enough to cause something like this before it's even born, then just how powerful is it? It might even be greater than D-Grade. The Low-quality D-Grade treasures I've found so far didn't have such a shocking effect on its surroundings at all.

"Well, the Tree of Ascension and that mushroom you found can barely be considered D-Grade treasures. Their ranking is as much based on their rarity as the actual power they contain. But I agree. Something like this should be Peak D-Grade at a minimum. No wonder that the cultists discarded everything for a chance at this treasure. It is likely worth more than your whole planet," Ogras said, the familiar tint of greed shining in his eyes.

"It's still odd that they only seem to be sporadically active," Zac muttered. "Unless the situation when you arrived the first time was out of the norm."

"Perhaps it was," Ogras ventured. "The blood and destruction wasn't fresh, but it wasn't too old either. Perhaps the defenses suddenly failed, allowing the natives to push further away from their bases than usual. Then the security measures recovered, and this sector became inaccessible again. We might be locked out of the rest of the base."

"But if that's the case, how will we ever be able to reach the core? If I can't survive pushing through in my Draugr Form, I don't think anyone of us will," Zac said with a frown.

"If the defenses have been down once, then it might happen again. Or perhaps the spatial turbulence here is a result of the artifact awakening, and is completely random," Ogras ventured.

Zac nodded before he turned toward the way they came from

"What are you doing?" Ogras asked with confusion as he followed in tow. "Ready for round two?"

"No," Zac said with a shake of his head. "But I want to see if the rifts are still there."

The chains of [Love's Bond] had moved them quite a distance in the minutes they fled, but they were soon back to the position where they stopped the last time. There wasn't a single spatial tear in sight the

whole way, and everything looked exactly the same as before with not even a hint of a spatial storm having swept the hallways just a few minutes ago.

However, Zac still felt the same sense of palpitations from his Danger Sense from the area ahead of them, meaning that the tears no doubt still hid behind some sort of cloaking. He shot a second glance at the corridor just to make sure, but [Cosmic Gaze] still couldn't spot anything. Taking six steps forward took him to the outer layer of the spatial tears, and his vision immediately lit up from the powerful energies they contained.

It really was the same sort of cloaking technology.

Zac eventually stepped back and placed a boulder to the side of the corridor at a safe distance from the trap before left a communication crystal warning of the dangers ahead on top of it. He didn't know if it would be cleansed just like everything else, but it was worth trying out.

"And there really was nothing like this the last time?" Zac asked as he turned back to Ogras.

"No way, you think I'd forget to mention something like this in my report?" Ogras said with a roll of his eyes. "I wasn't attacked a single time while I entered here, not counting the werewolf."

"It's a bit weird we're being attacked at all," Zac muttered. "I have a Tier-4 clearance of a Council Inspector. It should be enough for me to not get attacked just for walking down an empty corridor. There were no warnings or anything."

"There might have been warnings though," Ogras interjected. "Just that we don't have the equipment to hear it. So what do we do now?"

"Well, there's no lack of corridors," Zac eventually said. "Let's see if we can find an alternative route to the scene of the battle."

The demon nodded in agreement before he led Zac down another way. However, reaching their destination was quickly proving easier said than done, and they were forced to reroute by the very same type of spatial barriers as before another twenty-six times before Ogras finally declared they had arrived.

Altogether they had walked almost five times the distance as the direct route, and even Zac was starting to become a bit confused by this seemingly endless labyrinth. But coming here was definitely worth it since they had finally encountered something different. They weren't surprised that the bodies of the two fallen warriors were gone, but they didn't expect to see that something else left in their stead.

A large steel board had been placed in the middle of the corridor, and two lines of words were written in an eye-catching red. The letters were penned in the general script of the Multiverse, which Zac had mostly mastered by this point.

We are Clan Cartava, we mean no harm

The world is ending - Free us and gain an ally for life

Beneath the words was an extremely intricate map that highlighted a certain path. It was a bit hard to judge, but it looked like it would take them up to half a day to follow the path indicated. As to where it led, the board didn't say.

"A bit bombastic message," Zac muttered before he thought of something. "Do you think it's true? Will the birth of the treasure actually destroy the Mystic Realm?"

"I doubt it," Ogras said, though not without hesitation. "The Zealots are crazy, but they are not idiots. They wouldn't be so willing to move into this place if the treasure would blow up the whole mystic realm. Those guys clearly know what that thing is, and if it would break this place they would find some other way to snatch it. It's easy to forget because of their antics, but that bunch of lunatics belongs to a proper B-Grade force that spreads far beyond this sector"

"So they're lying?" Zac nodded at the signpost.

"They are either lying or they simply don't understand what's going on. We couldn't find out what a Dimensional Seed was even on the outside, so how can these people know? I'm more interested in the second line. 'Free us and gain an ally for life'? I guess that means the implicit meaning is 'Hinder us and gain an enemy for life?'"

"I feel they're trying to make first contact without divulging too much about themselves to either us or any other faction that might discover this thing. How did they know to leave this message here though? It's clearly meant for us, or perhaps any outsiders, rather than some other native faction. Did you leave a note as well?" Zac asked.

"No, I tried to make it look like the two killed each other. I didn't want my presence to be known at all. Otherwise, I would have snatched the bodies for further study," Ogras said with a shake of his head. "I must have slipped up or they have some means that could see through my actions. What do you want to do? Follow the map?"

"Not right now," Zac eventually said. "It will take us almost straight east for a huge distance. I'd rather get a better understanding of what we're dealing with before I head that far from our base."

A compass didn't work in this place, so directions were obviously a bit unclear in this place. However, they had a rough sketch of the Mystic Realm thanks to Julia's and Thea's efforts, and it looked a bit like a crude drawing of a sun or a star, where their secured area was located in one of the outer spikes.

The whole core section of the Mystic Realm formed a shockingly large circle, and the map essentially detailed a path that kept to a small part of the outer rim. The indicated path did have a huge amount of backtracking and twists and turns as well, making Zac believe that it took the spatial rifts into consideration.

They had already encountered a large number of barriers in their preliminary exploration, and it wasn't too out of field that there would be a lot more of them peppered throughout this place. This map might actually allow them to head over to the other camp while avoiding those spatial tears altogether.

"How is this thing still here though?" Ogras suddenly muttered, making Zac start and look away from the map.

"What?" Zac asked with confusion.

"All debris has been removed, even bloodstains are scrubbed clean. Why is this thing left untouched?"

“It’s made of metal that looks a lot like the walls,” Zac slowly said. “Perhaps the cleaning arrays or whatever doesn’t touch it because of that?”

“Perhaps,” Ogras muttered as he tried to lift the foot that the sign was attached to, but both were surprised to see that Ogras couldn’t budge it.

“Let me try,” Zac said and gripped the signboard, and veins started appearing across his forehead as he strained to dislodge the thing from the ground.

A snap finally echoed through the corridor as the sign gave way, and Zac was thrown backward from the accumulated force.

“What kind of super-glue was that?” Zac muttered as he rubbed the back of his head.

“Not glue,” Ogras muttered as he pointed at the base of the sign. “Look.”