

The Fall 590

Chapter 590: Let's Talk

Zac mutely looked at the quest prompt for a few seconds, realizing that his new Pathstrider-title wasted no time in causing trouble for him. He had been free from any meddling by the System since the battle outside the Tower of Eternity, but it looked like his good days were over.

Not only did the System force him to take a side, but it even said that this was just the first of a series of quests. The failure penalty was almost of grotesque proportions as well. Losing nine levels would put him right back at the start of the E-Grade, and this time he wouldn't be able to gain most of the levels through pills.

Of course, the real threat was losing two of his skills, and it was something he couldn't allow to happen no matter what.

The one small blessing was that there was no time limit on the quest, which allowed Zac to stay hidden for a bit longer to spy on the werewolves. The beastkin actually felt a bit familiar to the lunar wolves in the forest with all of them emitting the same sort of lunar energy. Most of them had mottled fur in black and silver, but one who emitted the strongest aura was almost completely silvery-white.

Zac guessed that the silver werewolf was the leader, and he even had a marking on his forehead. It pretty much confirmed Zac's earlier theory that the werewolves in this Research Base and the lunar wolves were somehow connected through bloodlines. The werewolves might even be normal humans who had the bloodline of the wolves transplanted into their bodies for all Zac knew.

The more pressing issue was how to deal with the situation.

The auras of the warriors weren't weak by any means, but neither did they make Zac feel a lot of pressure. He felt pretty confident in dealing with them without wasting any more of his aces, but that by itself made him a bit wary. The system wouldn't just give him a freebie, making him believe there was some catch to the quest.

So Zac wasn't in any rush to rush out, especially as the group was doing something that sparked Zac's curiosity.

They had been standing at a seemingly inconspicuous part of the wall, with one of the werewolves touching and prodding the smooth surface all this while. But it looked like he finally had found what he looked for, and he took out one disk after another and pressed them against the metal. The disks stayed in place like they had suction cups, and the beastkin quickly formed two vertical lines with the help of twelve identical disks.

The werewolf wasn't finished there, but he actually took out a tablet next and he connected it to one of the disks through a cable. It was a bit surreal watching a werewolf deftly using what seemed to be futuristic technology, but perhaps he shouldn't be surprised considering what kind of place this was.

There was still no sign of what they were up to even after the werewolf had been tapping away at the tablet with an almost dizzying speed for five minutes, but then there was finally a change. Zac couldn't believe what he was seeing as a gate started to take form in the wall with the disks acting as the frames.

It looked just like the gates they had passed through to get to this place, though it was only three meters high. It was also looking very rough, but it was gradually transforming into a proper door. Part of him wanted to stay and watch a while longer to see what else the tech-savvy werewolf had up his sleeve, but Zac knew that he couldn't wait longer if he wanted to intercept.

That door might disappear the moment they passed through it, locking Zac outside. There was no timer on the quest, but that didn't mean that he couldn't fail it. He slowly rose from his hidden position, but he had underestimated the senses of the werewolves as even that small movement put them on edge.

Their bodies immediately grew half a size as Zac prepared himself for battle, allowing them to tower over a meter above Zac. Their claws grew longer as well, and Zac felt that they could even match low quality E-Grade Tool Spirits.

Zac's hypothesis that these beastkin were related to the lunar wolves was further confirmed as they started radiating a cold piercing light that turned the whole area into a blinding white.

But Zac had already figured out the solution to this trick though, so he activated [Cosmic Gaze] and [Hatchetman's Spirit] which immediately allowed him to spot the trio. They had discarded their captive on the ground and were now rushing straight toward him while the leader stayed behind to observe.

The auras the warriors had grown since they transformed, but it was absolutely not to the point that Zac feared for his life. He still found himself in a tricky spot as he didn't want to kill them in order to not ruin any potential cooperation with these people. After all, the quest had told him to save the girl, but nothing about killing these people.

"Wait, let's talk-" Zac said as he lifted a hand to indicate that he didn't want trouble, but he was quickly forced to move his hand away as a series of claws ripped through the air in an attempt to cut it clean off.

The werewolves seemed to have taken his words as a sign of weakness as they looked at him with disdain. Zac was a bit confused about what gave these guys the guts to attack him even if his words were a bit defensive, but he suddenly realized that his aura was actually quite weak at the moment because of his broken pathways.

Not only that, but a lot of his excess spirituality was also swallowed by his [Spiritual Void] rather than being passively emitted from his body as an aura. He hadn't realized it before, but these two facts combined probably made him appear like a recently evolved cultivator at best. He still had a hard time deciding on a course of action though, so he was immediately put in a passive state as he started avoiding a furious barrage of claws infused with the power of the moon without trying to expose his real strength.

However, a single sentence immediately quenched his hopes of a peaceful release of the human girl.

"Don't kill him. He's one of the outsiders," the leader growled as he spectated the battle. "The others we caught were even weaker than this one. Let's take him with us to the relay station as well."

Zac's pupils shrunk as he immediately realized what the werewolf was talking about. It turned out that it was these werewolves who were responsible for his missing squad. A thick killing intent roiled out from his body, far eclipsing his diminutive aura, causing the pupils of his enemies to shrink into needlepoints.

The outburst was so powerful that even the unconscious human on the ground stirred awake, and the werewolves quickly tried to back away and regroup. However, how could Zac allow for something like that?

The closest werewolf was instantly bisected as [Verun's Bite] emitted a sanguine glow, leaving just four alive. The other two werewolves barely had time to flash away by turning into moonlight before Zac's blade reached them as well, but he was immediately hot in pursuit.

"He must be one of their leaders!" the silver werewolf shouted from behind. "Restrain him!"

The silver light in the whole area transformed the next moment as the wolves lit up like beacons, and the radiance was so powerful that the moonlight almost seemed to have turned into a liquid. It felt just like the restriction during his last fight, but perhaps even more powerful. Even worse, the pressure was steadily increasing, forcing him to flash forward with [Loamwalker], finally leaving the forest.

The light put some painful pressure on his still tender leg, but he knew that he simply needed to fight in a melee range to almost completely circumvent its effect. Someone with less Strength than him might have been completely unable to move due to the pressure though. He quickly targeted one of the soldiers at random, and while he seemed surprised at Zac's decisiveness he still quickly responded by slashing at Zac's throat with his claws.

Zac blocked it with his axe before he rammed him straight on with his shoulder, but he was a bit surprised by the result. He had expected to send the wolf flying with multiple broken bones, but he was actually just pushed back with a grunt. The bodies of these people were clearly extremely sturdy, making Zac wonder just what they had gone through to be in such a wretched state.

The attack had caused a shock to the werewolf's system though, allowing Zac to immediately follow up with a swing of [Verun's Bite] infused with the Fragment of the Axe.

A lunar barrier appeared to block the strike, but this was a High Mastery Dao Fragment. The barrier was cut apart like it was made from paper, and the werewolf's head was lopped off the next moment. Zac didn't get any time to celebrate though as he felt a searing pain on his neck and back as a series of crescent moons hidden in the moonlight slammed into him, instantly drenching his body with blood.

Zac grunted with pain, but he was more surprised that the attacks managed to hide from the omnipresence of [Hatchetman's Spirit]. He wildly looked around with [Cosmic Gaze] to spot the source of the attacks, and he realized that another werewolf had appeared from the forest. But Zac was even more surprised to see that the newcomer was ignoring him after the first barrage, and instead was rushing straight toward the gate.

Not only that, but the others were doing the same, even leaving behind their tools and backpacks on the ground.

"Run! Run!" the leader shouted as he kicked the girl on the ground, which launched her body into the arms of one of the others. "Open that god damn thing even if the algorithms are imperfect!"

Zac could sigh at how different these guys were compared to their frenzied cousins as he set out in pursuit.

Two combatants were already down, which left three more to go, not counting the wolf who was still desperately working on opening the door. Zac was starting to feel a bit woozy from fighting in his current condition, but it wasn't like he had any option but to keep going.

It was a bit risky, but he started pushing energy into the skill fractal of [RapturousDivide] as a fractal blade appeared in front of his axehead. Zac knew he would need to take them out before they opened that door so he wanted to catch them all in a close-range swipe. However, a series of spatial tears suddenly appeared out of nowhere, almost cutting him to ribbons.

Zac desperately jumped out of the way as he looked for the source of the attack. It was the backpack that one of the werewolves had discarded earlier. It was actually a booby-trap, but Zac had ignored it because it didn't emit even a hint of Cosmic Energy, and his danger sense didn't warn him either.

He quickly tried to find his footing and resume his pursuit, but a sense of foreboding suddenly came over him. However, he didn't even have time to make a move before a hand appeared from the moonlight and pressed a small mechanical item against his chest.

Terror filled Zac's heart when he thought he was about to get ripped apart by a bunch of spatial tears, but one fear was replaced with another as he found his body completely restrained. That little thing that looked like a toy had somehow taken control of the Cosmic Energy in his body, and his body had locked itself into place.

He tried to struggle free, but moving was completely impossible.

"Shit, the outsiders have some formidable people," the silver werewolf spat as he emerged out of the moonlight, and he lifted Zac by his neck before started to walk toward the others. "But that's good. This one should know a lot more than those scouts."

Zac wasn't even able to respond, but he was suddenly filled with hope as he noticed something. His Specialty Core wasn't restrained at all by the odd item latched to his chest, and it had even started its transformation. The werewolf was thankfully completely oblivious to that fact as he was more focused on the wolf dealing with the gate.

He didn't get any further than ten meters though as the massive cage of death sprung up around him, trapping all the remaining werewolves along with the human captive. The cable connecting the werewolf's tablet to the wall was ripped apart by the barrier of [Profane Seal] as well, effectively stopping his work.

The weird Technocrat restraining tool fell to the ground as Zac's hand punched through the chest of the werewolf leader. The bindings before had made him drop [Verun's Bite], but his hand still had terrifying penetrating power since it was infused with his recently upgraded Dao Fragment.

The werewolf leader looked into Zac's abyssal eyes for a second before his head rolled over, and Zac felt a surge of energy entering his body. The pitch-black armor of [Vanguard of Undeath] covered him the next moment as he turned toward the remaining werewolves, and over a dozen chains stabbed toward the disbelieving targets as Zac started to advance on them.

The unexpected close call was enough for him to completely clear his head, and Zac immediately started his customary grinding down of his targets with newfound zeal. The werewolves tried to turn into motes

of light to escape again, but their moonlight was completely overpowered by the combination of [Winds of Decay] and [Fields of Despair].

Just a few seconds later only one enemy was left alive, the werewolf who had been responsible for summoning the gate earlier. Zac figured that he would be able to answer some questions in case the human girl didn't know, for example where that relay station was. He left the werewolf utterly restrained by his sets of chains, but he couldn't help but feel a headache coming on as he turned his abyssal eyes toward the human.

She had been shocked awake by the kick earlier, and she had witnessed everything that came afterward. Him getting locked down and then transforming to a Draugr. He knew that his unique situation would be exposed to the world sooner or later, but it was still too early. If this girl was allowed to return to her clan, then he would sooner or later be exposed. Not even a contract felt like a surefire way to protect the secrets as Catheya had explained.

But could he really kill her to protect his secret? That would definitely be crossing a line.

"Don't kill me. I won't tell anyone, I swear on my Clan's name," the girl hurriedly said, clearly understanding what kind of thoughts were running through Zac's mind.

"I won't harm you," Zac eventually said after some pause. "But I can't just let you go either. At least not for the time being. What you saw can get both me and my people in trouble if it spreads out. You will need to sign a contract and stay with me for a while."

"I understand your predicament, I really do," the girl sighed. "But I have too many people depending on me. I cannot let that happen. But don't worry. You risked your life to save me, so I'll keep my word."

Alarm bells immediately went off in Zac's mind when he heard her response, and Zac immediately erected every defense he had while launching every single free chain at her. She was planning something, something dangerous. The feeling of alarm only intensified as the girl's eyes turned white, and Zac fought a strange feeling that enveloped his mind as he tried to restrain her before it was too late.

Zac desperately jumped out of the way as he looked for the source of the attack. It was the backpack that one of the werewolves had discarded earlier. It was actually a booby-trap, but Zac had ignored it because it didn't emit even a hint of Cosmic Energy, and his danger sense didn't warn him either.

He quickly tried to find his footing and resume his pursuit, but a weird mental nudge pushed him back a step.

"Behind you!" the human girl screamed in warning, and Zac's reaction was instantaneous.