

The Fall 592

Chapter 592: Datamancers

Zac once more got a weird feeling when he looked into Leviala's eyes now that she had woken up. Of course, that might be because of the way they looked. The girl looked like a normal, albeit frail, Caucasian girl, with a both short and lithe frame. However, her eyes dashed any chance of mistaking her for some random Earthling.

One of them was normal, though it seemed to contain impurities, small spots of darkness peppered about her sclera and green iris. But the other eye was completely white, to the point that it seemed that she was born without a pupil at all. In its place was an extremely dense fractal, and trying to understand it with [Primal Polyglot] could only provide him with one hint.

It was a curse, one aimed at the girl herself.

"I'm the one who should be thanking you for the warning before," Zac shrugged as he handed her the bottle of water, trying to not appear weirded out by the odd appearance of the eye. "Are you okay? I didn't know what was wrong with you, so I simply gave you a couple of different healing pills."

"My soul is wounded, but whatever you gave me is really helping. The outside is really full of marvelous things," she said with a weak smile.

"So I'm guessing you're from Clan Cartava?" Zac said. "How did you end up getting captured?"

"The Lunar Tribe have kept a lot of secrets over the years it seems," Leviala sighed. "We've always thought them muscleheads with limited understanding of how this world works. But they managed to sneak all the way to our domiciles without triggering any of our alarms. They used pathways that we had no idea existed and killed my guards before the elders had a chance to react."

Zac slowly nodded. It wasn't too surprising if the native forces finally started to make use of hidden aces they had accumulated over the past millennia now that the world was changing. No matter if it was to get out of this place or to seize the treasures of this Mystic Realm, now was the time to go all out.

It was a bit odd that these werewolves had wasted this opportunity on this girl in front of him though. It was almost a suicide mission to infiltrate a hostile faction like that, and he couldn't see anything on her that was worth the effort. He had already searched her for Cosmos Sacks or other spatial tools, and there simply wasn't anything on her.

The most likely reason was the parting words of the werewolf leader, but Zac had no time to worry about the key to immortality. He had a quest to complete. But there were some things he needed to understand before setting out.

"What is this thing?" Zac asked as he took out the small mechanism that he almost was struck by before. "A weapon?"

"No, they're called restraint modules," the girl said with a shake of her head as she took out an identical one from within her robes. "It locks your Cosmic Energy in place, which also restricts your movement. It was used to restrain research subjects long ago."

“So it was something like that,” Zac whistled, though he wouldn’t completely take her word for it. “Then how are you free?”

“They lose their efficacy over time as the body adapts. But my parents also implanted me with a hidden blocker at birth and only told me and my grandfather. It contains an algorithm to deactivate restraint modules and some other things, and enough Base Power to connect with items outside my body,” Leviala said. “I was waiting for an opportunity to escape, but those werewolves were too vigilant. Luckily you came along.”

“Base Power? What’s that?” Zac asked as he put away the small mechanism.

“It’s the energy that this base runs on. All the tools we’ve looted in this world runs on Base Power, and it’s also required to interface with the base itself,” Leviala explained.

“Is that why this tablet won’t start up?” Zac said as he waved the thing he looted from the werewolf leader.

“Yes, these things require a fresh stream of Base Power to operate,” Leviala nodded before she looked at the disks lying next to Zac with a frown. “What are you doing?”

“I need to get to the other side, but the door those werewolves summoned is gone. You should have heard them before, they have captured one of our squads. I want to get them back,” Zac said. “How do I get that door to open again?”

“You shouldn’t go there. The Wasteland is in that direction,” Leviala said, her face turning a shade paler. “Besides, they should have been taken to the relay station. There are probably multiple squads waiting there to cross the Wasteland together. Not only that, the base might be protected by other means as well. I’m afraid that it’s impossible to save your friends.”

“Let me worry about that,” Zac shrugged as he poured out everything from the werewolf’s Cosmos Sack on the ground. “Where can I get this Base Power? Does anything among these items contain it?”

“Listen to me, it’s a shame about your people, but we need to get out of this world. We are about to be trapped again in just a few days. The world is ending. Getting caught inside will only doom both our Clans,” she said as her odd eyes bore into his.

“We know,” Zac said, ignoring the discomfort of the stare. “About the trapped thing, that is.”

“You know? Why are you people still staying here then? The space treasure? You don’t understand the horror of that thing,” the girl said with fear in her eyes, a fear that didn’t seem faked to Zac. “Our Clan is ready to form an alliance with your leaders, provided that you help us out of this place. We left you a map to this forest before the storms returned. If you open a specific gate from your side, we can all-”

“I’m sorry, but we aren’t going anywhere,” Zac said with a shake of his head. “And neither are we letting anyone out. Now, these things, how do-”

“Why not?” Leviala blurted, and it was obvious she felt that Zac was a lunatic for wanting to stay in this place. “We know that your world is newly introduced to the world of cultivation, and we can help. There is much we have lost while locked in this place, but we can help each other to face the threat of outsiders.”

"Various reasons. But most the most important task our faction is dealing with is to hunt down a group of insectoid humanoids," Zac sighed, slightly annoyed at the delay.

He knew that he needed the help of this girl if he wanted to use these machines though, as there was no time to go get his sister. So he quickly calmed down so that he could explain what was going on. He took out a picture of Void's Disciple that they had captured when the Dominator had entered Site 17.

"Unless this man dies, then everyone, including the people of your Clan, will die. The same probably goes for a group of cultists that have entered this place. They need to be taken out as well. I don't really care about that treasure, but our enemies do. That's our way to hunt them down."

Blank incomprehension was written all over Leviala's face, but even more-so despair. Zac guessed that she had expected to finally be able to leave this prison of theirs pretty soon, but that door had suddenly closed right in her face.

"I cannot speak for my elders... But if what you're saying is true, then Clan Cartava might be able to help you locate these threats. But can you explain what's going on? I'm willing to act as a liaison between our forces," she said after some thought.

Zac immediately explained the threat of The Great Redeemer and the Church of Everlasting Dao in broad strokes, about the Karmic Ties that needed to be severed for their planet to remain hidden. This was not some secret intelligence, after all, but rather something that was generally disseminated by this point. Of course, a lot of people believed it was just a ruse by him and Port Atwood to seize control.

"A Deviant Karmic Cultivator, at peak D-Grade at that?" Leviala blanched. "It seems the outside isn't all that safe either."

"We all have our problems," Zac said with a wry smile. "Now, the door?"

"A Datamancer is needed to open this thing, along with the specific key-code. This whole world is full of hidden pathways like this, but we know of less than one percent of them. Forcing the gate-protocol to activate is almost impossible without the prerequisite knowledge."

"A Datamancer? What?" Zac asked.

"That's what we call those who can interface with this base. Only they can rewrite protocols and bypass the restrictions. You should have people like this as well. Opening the gate to this forest was a test of sorts. Unless you have people extremely skilled in data manipulation you wouldn't be able to pass that gate, let alone let us out," Leviala explained.

"Hackers?" Zac muttered. "I'm sorry, but that's not how we got here."

"What?" Leviala said with confusion. "Did you manage to break the door open? Do you possess such powerful means?"

"No. One of my friends almost got himself killed trying that," Zac snorted. "I have clearance high enough to open the door."

"Clearance? Wait... You're part of the Builders?!" she shrieked as she tried to get away.

Zac was a bit surprised at the strong reaction, but he couldn't let the girl get away. He instructed [Love's Bond] to snatch up the running girl, which wasn't too hard considering how weakened her current condition was. She didn't even get to her feet before she fell over again, only making it three meters in her escape.

Using the chains was as much to help her get up as to prevent her from escaping. It was a bit of a safety measure though as he was afraid Leviala possessed some sort of escape treasure or skill.

"Calm down. I'm not part of any builders," Zac said after Leviala had stopped struggling against the bindings. "The terminal where we arrived gives out clearances left and right. Most people got Tier-2 or Tier-3 clearance, but I managed to get Tier-4 clearance thanks to an item I acquired off-world. That's how I got in here."

Of course, Zac suspected that he tenuously could be considered part of the "builders", provided that Leviala was referring to his mother's Clan. But he wasn't about to divulge that sort of information seeing her strong reaction. Still, her reactions just now had divulged a lot. Not only did the natives completely lack clearances, but Clan Cartava didn't seem to know as much about them as he'd feared after seeing the signpost left behind.

"What? Such a thing is possible? I've never heard of a terminal giving out clearances. Is it because you're outsiders, perhaps? It seems a lot of our assumptions about you were incorrect." Leviala mumbled with a slight frown before her eyes lit up. "You have traveled between worlds? How is it? What kinds of places exist out there?"

"I've been off-planet a few times, yes. There are all kinds of worlds out there, but I can't tell you about it right now. I'm a bit strapped for time," Zac said. "So, the Base Power? Anything among these things that has it? I want to activate the tablet."

It felt like Zac had over a hundred questions rattling around in his head, but he needed to prioritize his quest for now.

"These things are called chargers," Leviala eventually said as she pointed down at a cylindrical item. "Press the sheer side against the bottom of the tablet for a few seconds to instill it with power."

Zac followed her instructions and it worked just as described. The tablet turned on after two seconds of charging, though that didn't help Zac much. Rows and boxes full of illegible text covered the screen, and Zac couldn't make heads or tails of it.

"Do you know how to work these things?" Zac asked.

"No," she said with a shake of her head. "I can read the language, but I don't know how these things work. It takes decades to learn these things, and only the Datamancers can make use of this information in any case. You would have to find the line for activating the door, and then bypass the security protocols."

Zac thought for a second before he showed her the tablet.

"Let me worry about the security checks. Can you tell me if one of these boxes is related to gate opening?"

"It's either that or climbing through one of the cracks," Zac added.

"That's even more impossible!" Leviala said. "There are security protocols in place to trap research subjects. You're almost guaranteed to get trapped inside the Memorysteel if you try to enter through one of those places, and there are no builders to let you out. Not a single one who has been caught inside a wall has ever made it out as far as I know."

Zac simply stared at her in response as he held the tablet toward her. She eventually sighed in defeat before her eyes started darting back and forth for almost a minute. She finally pointed at one of the boxes, though hesitation was written all over her face.

"Perhaps this one? It seems to mention something about a security check, which is always performed when opening a door. The other algorithms seem to be more related to the general operation of the wall itself," she said. "But just finding the right program isn't enough."

Zac nodded in thanks before he took the tablet. He honestly had no idea what to do from this point on, but he gained some confidence from the simple fact that he got the quest by the System. It seemed to believe he would have a chance to complete it, meaning he should be able to open the door.

He didn't even try to understand what he was looking at since it was too far beyond his understanding and he simply pressed the box Leviala indicated. However, he did take one precaution though. He had taken out his mother's token from his Spatial ring, and he held it against the same spot as the charger when he pressed the button.

"Wait, what are you doing?! You will alert the security protocols!" Leviala screamed when saw Zac's impetuous actions, but her words got caught in her throat when the gate started forming without issue, and at a much greater speed than when the werewolf was trying to conjure it.