

The Fall 593

Chapter 593: Old Friends

"I'm in," Zac said, his mouth tugging upward as he felt like the lead in an 80's movie about hackers.

This was obviously lost on the Cartava scion though, and she blankly looked back and forth between him and the gate.

"Wh- How?" she eventually sputtered, looking like a lifetime of common sense was rapidly being upended.

"I have my ways," Zac smiled as he stashed away the talisman again before the Cartava scion could spot it.

The talisman didn't contain any clear hints of its origins as far as Zac could tell, but it was obviously a technocrat Tool if you knew a bit about them. Even Ogras could discern the truth at a single glance, and someone like Leviale could probably glean even more. He obviously wouldn't divulge his secrets to this stranger, even if she was cooperative so far.

The door slid open a second later, exposing the interiors. The state of the base on the other side was far worse than even the war-torn wall. The walls of the corridor had completely crumbled, and even the roof was missing at spots.

Only an endless black could be glimpsed through the cracks, making it seem as though the research base was hurtling through space. But the darkness that Zac could see through the cracks rather reminded Zac of the bleak blackness of the Abyss he could glimpse through [Rapturous Divide] rather than the empty darkness of outer space.

The truth probably wasn't quite that sinister though. Mystic Realms were pocket sub-dimensions, and they had to have an end somewhere. What he saw was probably the void between dimensions, the place where one would end up if you fell through a spatial tear. However, he still got an oppressive feeling when he looked, so Zac's instincts told him there were other dangers lurking in the darkness.

The scene gave Zac some pause, but he quickly roused himself. There was no telling how long the door would last even if he used his mother's token.

"Okay, let's go," Zac nodded as he started walking, but Leviale looked at him like he was crazy.

"What? You want me to go?" Leviale almost screamed, her face a mix of horror and confusion. "I am no good to you. You've seen the state I'm in, I'll only be a burden. I'll rest up before returning to my clan instead. That way I can warn them about those enemies of yours so that we can start prepar-"

"There'll be plenty of time for that later," Zac said as the chains of [Love's Bond] once more lifted the aghast Cartava scion into the air. "I'm sorry but I'll need to bring you along as a guide. You've already proven you're essential to rescuing my people by helping me with the tablet."

"I've never been to this section of the base! I'll be of no use to you!" she exclaimed as she vehemently struggled against the restraints.

But Zac ignored her complaints as he stepped through the gate which soundlessly closed behind them. A few seconds later it had turned into another piece of broken corridors that ran along the wall. Strangely enough, there was no telling that a vast forest stood on the other side of the wall after passing through, not even after peering through the cracks. Only a murky haze could be seen on the other side, making Zac believe the cracks were actually filled with spatial anomalies.

No wonder the werewolves refused to take a shortcut.

"So much for not being captured. It was all for nothing," Levala muttered with a hint of despair from her chain cocoon, and Zac could only apologetically smile in response.

She was right. She might have gone out of the ashes into the fire from her perspective, swapping a known captor to a more powerful unknown one. Not only that, but Zac was also fumbling in the dark in this dangerous place, which put them both at risk. But there was nothing to be done about the situation. The System gave him no choice in the matter.

"I really am sorry about all this," Zac coughed as he stepped further inside, dragging a clearly unwilling Levala along with his chains. "You could say my hands are tied."

"Stop, STOP!" she screamed. "Alright, I'll help you. But stop walking ahead randomly or you'll get us both killed!"

"What, really?" Zac said, but he still stopped in his tracks. "Help me with this matter and I'll make it up to you. Is there anything you or your Clan needs? I can send for it before the pathways to this world close."

"Like what?" Levala asked curiously as she stopped struggling against the restraints, confirming Zac's guess.

This girl was full of curiosity about the outside world and its marvels, which wasn't too surprising considering her situation. Hopefully, he would be able to use that to keep her cooperative.

"I have no idea what you guys are lacking in this world. Pills? Manuals? Attuned Crystals?"

"Land," Levala said without hesitation. "I've heard that planets have spots with greater energy density compared to others, treasure lands where you can cultivate at twice the speed at half the effort. Can you provide us with such a thing?"

"There are a few such places on Earth," Zac slowly nodded. "But those places are extremely valuable strategic resources. Being my guide for a few hours isn't worth a Nexus Vein, no offense."

"I also saved you from being captured by werewolves by warning you, but fine. We'll revisit this matter later," Levala sighed. "Our first priority should be staying alive in this place."

"Good. Now, how do I find that relay station?" Zac asked.

"I don't know where it is, but it shouldn't be too far in from this gate. Half an hour away at the most. Any further and the station would be inside the Wasteland itself, and no permanent structure can survive in there. But make no mistake, our lives are in peril every second even here at the edge."

"What's the Wasteland?" Zac asked with a frown. "Another Biosphere like the forest before?"

“No,” Leviala said with a shake of her head. “Something much more dangerous. It will take some time to explain, but you need to understand the dangers to not get us both killed.”

“Give me the abridged version,” Zac reluctantly agreed, though part of him just wanted to set out.

The windows into the void looked pretty unsettling, but the atmosphere was intact and there was no suction dragging items out through the cracks. As for spatial tears, Zac figured his Luck had proven a pretty good early warning system. But seeing Leviala's exaggerated reactions there were probably more dangers than what met the eyes.

“Our people were taken here over fifteen thousand years ago and experimented on for millennia,” Leviala began, but was interrupted by an impatient Zac.

“Is this really the short version?”

“Just listen,” Leviala said with a glare. “We were taken here because of our bloodlines, but there was an incident that put an end to the experiments around five thousand years ago. A mystical item appeared out of nowhere, rippling through the spatial barriers like they didn't exist.

“It slammed into this base like a meteor, completely ripping apart a large section of it. It hit the base from the east, annihilating the subjects who were experimented on there. Only by digging through data did we find out that the subjects there was a clan of Titans, renowned for their physical prowess.”

Zac's heartbeat sped up a bit when he heard the mention of Titans, although he had already been somewhat certain that this place was the source of Billy's heritage. However, it seemed more likely that Billy's ancestor somehow managed to reach Earth through a spatial tear or something, rather than the whole clan escaping.

“The object made its way into the core of the base, presumably killing all our captors as well,” Leviala continued.

“Presumably? You don't know if they were killed?” Zac asked with confusion.

“What followed after the impact was over a hundred years of spatial chaos. We call the event the Cataclysm. You should have encountered those rifts by now, right? Those kinds of things raged across the whole base, wreaking havoc. We lost most of our people during those days. But one day it just stopped and the base woke up again. By that time our captors were all gone, and we slowly managed to eke out a living here,” Leviala said.

“Do you know who was it that captured you?” Zac asked curiously.

“They called themselves the Tsarun Clan,” Leviala said.

“WHAT?!” Zac exclaimed. “Those guys?”

“You know of them? Are they still around? Do they know of your planet?” Leviala said, fear shining in her eyes. “Our elders were peak D-Grade, but they were all slaughtered by those people when they came for us. They are terrifying.”

“They're around, and they are still extremely powerful. They have a pretty unsavory reputation as well, and no one wants to make an enemy out of them. There are also rumors of them working with

unorthodox forces to become more powerful. So I guess it's not too surprising they started messing around with a Technocrat Research Base," Zac explained.

Leviala looked shocked that their captor was still around and living well.

"You don't need to worry about me selling you out though," Zac added when he saw the fear in her eyes. "They probably are more interested in capturing me than they are in capturing you."

"What? Are you carrying a unique bloodline as well?" Leviala blurted.

"No, we are enemies for other reasons. A small disagreement ended up with them losing one of their main-branch descendants and getting publicly embarrassed," Zac slowly said, his voice somewhat decreasing in strength after seeing the mounting horror in her eyes. "Anyway, I guess we have a common enemy? So what happened afterward?"

"When my ancestors realized they were left alone in this place they immediately started looking for an escape. But movement in this place is always highly restricted, and we never found a way out. However, we managed to find a few tablets left behind by the Tsarun Clan and that's how we learned the methods of the Datamancers," Leviala said.

"Unfortunately, only a few of our people can become true Datamancers as they can't be registered as research subjects by the AI of this place. Only one out of a thousand might have the ability to become a Datamancer, and even then it's highly random their degree of success," Leviala said.

"People without bloodlines," Zac muttered.

"Exactly," Leviala nodded. "Our clan was essentially bred and experimented on for millennia with the sole purpose of purifying and strengthening our bloodline, and it was the same with the other clans. For someone to be born without it after all that it is extremely rare. I guess there are a lot more potential Datamancers among you outsiders."

"In either case. We found out about the fundamental rules of this base through reading the Tsarun Clan reports. As you mentioned, they didn't build this base. They rather stumbled upon it during an exploration trip outside of integrated space. They spent tens of thousands of years slowly gaining control over the basic functions, but we believe they never managed to get a hold on the core secrets of this place," Leviala continued.

"What do you know about the original creators?" Zac asked, straining to keep his face impassive.

"Not much," Leviala said with a shake of her head. "We know they were terrifyingly powerful, far greater than the Tsarun Clan. We think they finished their research then left this base, though we don't know why they didn't repurpose this place. The Tsarun were only digging through the scraps for their own project."

Zac sighed and nodded. He wasn't sure she was telling the truth or kept the secrets about his mother's clan to herself, but there was still ample time to find out the truth.

"This is all valuable information, but what does this have to do with the Wastelands?" Zac asked, returning to the main subject.

"I needed you to understand how dangerous it was during the age after the cataclysm, where less than five percent of our Clan survived. Because the wasteland never healed. It is the sector where the dimensional treasure passed through before hitting the core of this base, and the laws of space are still in flux here. The rest of this world has found an equilibrium and is bound by the rules of the Builders, but the wasteland is in a permanent state of turmoil," Leviala sighed.

"So what? If the werewolves can pass it, so can I," Zac said.

"We have spent millennia mapping the spatial storms, but that knowledge holds no sway in the wastelands. A spatial storm can descend on you at moment's notice, and that's not all. This area is full of spatial holes, and sometimes things fall out. Dangerous things," she said, her eyes inadvertently darting toward the ominous scars in the ceiling.

"Dangerous things?" Zac said with a frown.

"There are weird dimensional beasts hidden in the darkness. They can't survive in our environment for long, and they cause massive destruction in their attempts to return to the void. Encountering those things almost always results in death. But other things can fall out as well, like a mountain getting dropped on your head. You never know," Leviala said.

"Then how can the Lunar Tribe pass it?"

"They live the closest to the wasteland, so they understand it the best. Their bodies are also very strong, and their lunar skills allow them to briefly pass through spatial storms unscathed. I've heard they also maintain routes where they have left protective measures, like small safe bubbles powered by Base Power," Leviala said.

"Don't your clan have something similar?" Zac asked with a frown.

"No. We never go here. Treasures sometimes fall out of the void, but the dangers far overshadow the potential gain. Besides, passing the wasteland only leads to the Lunar Tribe, and you've seen how our relationship is," Leviala said.

"So, the relay station?" Zac asked.

"It's probably a base where the scouting units gather to cross the wasteland together. Powering those safe bubbles require a lot of Base Power, and each squad can't pass alone. Besides, there is safety in numbers. I've also heard that they make the troublemakers and the elderly take the vanguard, so they'll somewhat block the spatial storms with their bodies if one arrives unnoticed," Leviala said.

"Okay, we hopefully won't need to worry about that. Which way? If you don't know, just follow your instincts," Zac said.

Leviala looked into the eyes of Zac for a few seconds before she sighed as a small glimmer activated in her eyes. Her one remaining good eye turned milky white the next moment, eliciting a strong sense of unease in Zac's mind. However, it soon returned to normal, though Leviala looked even more sickly than before.

"That way," she said as she nodded at a route as blood started to flow down her nose again. "Now, can you rearrange these chains to something more comfortable?"

