

The Fall 601

Chapter 601: Next Step

Zac estimated it would take up to a day before they would reach the glasshouse since his flying treasure wouldn't work inside Mystic Realms. This wasn't a failing of his leaf, but rather how E-Grade flying treasures were created. They generally were dependant on the energy in the ground, which was why Zac's could fly no higher than a few hundred meters into the air.

These methods rarely worked in Mystic Realms because they didn't have World Cores to rely on, and only D-Grade flying treasures who were completely powered by themselves or the user could fly freely. There were apparently specially made E-Grade flying treasures that would work in Mystic Realms as well, but that wasn't something Zac had access to right now.

Moving through an empty forest at least allowed him to learn more about the Research Base, so he walked next to Leviala most of the time exchanging information about Earth or the latest situation in the Zecia sector for intelligence on the Mystic Realm. He quickly gained a better understanding of the factions and their locations, and he found that the Cartava clan was surprisingly close to his own entrance.

However, their domiciles were on the other side of the Outer Band, making it almost impossible to travel between their bases. The natives split the base into four sectors, each formed like a ring around the core of the base. First was the Outer Rim where Zac's people appeared, and the next ring was called the Living Layer.

All the factions lived in this layer since the energy density there was better than the outer rim, while simultaneously not being actively controlled by the Administrator. These settlements sprawled out over Biospheres like those Zac had set up his base in, to Laboratories and emptied warehouses.

Next was the inner layer, where a lot of the core structures of the Research base were located, including the lab that Zac needed to reach for his quest. This layer was only accessible during the specific windows Leviala mentioned before. Finally, there was the core. Leviala wasn't actually sure what went on there, though she might have been holding back.

She said that most natives believed the core to be the residential areas of the Builders, and perhaps where the computers housing The Administrator was located. There were also rumors of peak resources being kept there for the most precious experiments, resources that not even the Tsarun Clan had managed to get their hands on. Of course, now it was also the home of the Dimensional Seed.

The newfound knowledge made Zac a bit hesitant about whether he had done the right thing to not pass through the wasteland. In the opposite direction of the Wasteland was the True Sky Faction and the New World Government, with the government's starting position being very similar to his own.

Zac guessed that either the Dominators or the Church of Everlasting Dao should be somewhere close to the Lunar Clan, with the other faction being close to the Gemlings. Such a spread definitely didn't feel random, but rather something the System had orchestrated when integrating this Mystic Realm. Perhaps that was even the reason Leandra's Clan abandoned this place; it had been discovered by the System, and continuing to perform experiments would bring that terrifying lightning down on their heads.

He also started to get a better understanding of the Tsarun-clan's goals. They had captured Leviala's clan for their ancestor's ability to harness Time. The Tsarun Patriarch still hadn't reached the end of his lifespan from what Zac had heard, but he wasn't exactly young either. If he could extract time out of the Cartava Clan's eyes he might be able to increase his lifespan a few times over, allowing him to keep making breakthroughs.

The gemlings on the opposite sides were probably brought in for their ability to make money. They were a weird golemlike clan from Leviala's explanations, and their bloodline was pretty odd. They were able to cut off parts of their souls and imbue it into gems they grew on their bodies, and then use those gems as cores for Spirit Tools.

This practice almost guaranteed that the Spirit Tool would have a great spirituality, which increased their value more than tenfold. The only issue was the bloodline among these gemlings was extremely weak, and they needed a lot of assistance to activate their heritage. But as long as the Tsarun Clan managed to purify their bloodlines, then they would be able to essentially farm those precious crystals and make a fortune.

The Titans were probably brought for their prowess, and cultivating warriors with that bloodline would bolster their armies. As for the Lunar Clan, he wasn't as sure, but perhaps it was because of their lunar ability. Their Leader, Cervantes, was almost immortal according to Leviala, and he could freely swap back and forth between moonlight and flesh. Not even imbuing attacks with Dao had helped bring him down during the wars over the past two thousand years, and he was generally considered the most powerful warrior in the Mystic Realm.

As for the True Sky Faction, it wasn't actually a unique race at all. The Tsarun clan had apparently captured thousands of people with various bloodlines, probably in search of something valuable. These people banded together after the Cataclysm, led by a few cultivators who all carried unique powerful bloodlines.

But the fact that the faction had so many different backgrounds had resulted in the dilution of any inherent bloodlines. On the flip-side that had resulted in them having by far the most Datamancers of the four factions, and they were usually the ones who hosted the various trade meetings when the barriers were lifted.

That was partly because they were the most populous faction though. Thanks to the large number of Datamancers they had managed to secure and take control of dozens of habitable sections in the second layer, essentially turning one side of the base into a small kingdom with a capital and multiple towns.

Even some people from the other three clans had decided to join the True Sky Factions over the years, though generally these people were outcasts of their factions for one reason or another.

The hours passed in this manner until Leviala suddenly stopped. Zac looked around in confusion, first thinking that some Lunar Wolves had appeared. However, Leviala rather walked toward the wall. The section looked the same as the sections that they had passed until now, but Zac understood that there probably was a hidden gate in this area.

"Is this the path to your clan?" Zac asked.

"One of them," Leviala said. "I mentioned it before, but a bit further there is a proper gate, not a hidden service entrance like the ones we have used. That gate leads straight toward the inner sector, but our clan can be found within a few hours' travel. This place is a hidden gate that we haven't managed to unlock yet, but you seem to be able to walk unhindered in this base. I thought it was better to take an unknown route back in case more werewolves are lurking around."

"I'll see what I can do," Zac said as he started placing disks where Leviala indicated.

He had been struggling a bit about what to do with Leviala, but he eventually decided to send her back to allow her people to start preparations. There was a small risk that she would bring home intelligence on him that would be used to betray Port Atwood, but Zac felt that to be a slim risk. She had seen first-hand how he had dealt with the Werewolves and the Collector, and how freely his people could move through the base.

The Cartava Clan didn't stand to gain anything by going against him, but they could benefit greatly by allying themselves with Port Atwood.

"What's your next step?" Leviala finally asked as Zac's preparations were nearing completion.

"I'm heading to the Inner Circle, following one of the maps I got," Zac eventually said. "I need to find a way to the Core."

"You would need a guide even if you have a map. The inner section presents its own challenges," Leviala slowly said.

"What do you have in mind?" Zac asked with a small smile.

"How about we set a time and place to meet up? Perhaps at the edge of the Living Layer. The way there shouldn't be too dangerous, but after that things might get complicated depending on what security measures we'll encounter," Leviala said.

Zac thought about it for a few seconds, but he eventually agreed. He was already planning on bringing Kenzie since his instincts told him he would need Jeeves' assistance to get to the core, but bringing a native would bring a lot of knowledge to the table. They decided on a location to meet, and the time would be in two days. That would give Zac enough time to deal with everything back at the base and return.

"Be careful on your return. You never told me exactly how you got captured, but it seems a bit odd to me. Can you be sure that no one in your clan is working against you?" Zac said as he connected his tablet to the disks on the wall. "If things get out of hand you can always come to our side. We're always happy to welcome new talent to our ranks."

"No clan members would do something like working with the Lunar Clan at such an integral time," Leviala muttered, though it sounded like she was trying to convince herself as much as she was Zac.

"Step back," Zac said as he turned to the scouts as he took out his axe.

"What are you-?" Leviala said with confusion, but she quickly realized what was going on.

Zac only shrugged in response before he activated the tablet. His axe might be useless in case the wall came alive, but it would work just fine in case there was an army of hostile combatants on the other

side, no matter if it was Cartava clan members or werewolves. Thankfully only empty halls met his eyes as the gates slid open.

"I'll see you in a few days then," Leviala said. "I'll bring a talented Datamancer to help out as well. Don't worry, it's my first-degree uncle and he's our family's chief technician."

Zac nodded in understanding. When she talked about family in this case she wasn't talking about the whole Cartava Clan that was comprised of almost 40 000 members. It was rather her actual family in the same sense that he would use the word. Having someone like her uncle there would no doubt help a lot, and the Datamancers seemed more akin to a crafting class than a combat-class, so Zac wasn't worried even if he was E-Grade.

Leviala entered the next moment, her steps still a bit unsteady. However, Zac had gifted her a set of various pills, partly to help her get home in one piece, and partly as some sort of display of the good things that he could provide in return for the natives' cooperation.

There was no point in dawdling around, and the six remaining people of the group immediately set out as the gate merged into the wall behind them.

They were almost half-way to the glass-house by this point, but only one hour passed before Zac sensed something. Zac instantly flashed in front of his group as [Verun's Bite] appeared in his hands, but he relaxed when he saw Thea stepping out from behind a tree a hundred meters away. She turned into a gust the next moment, immediately appearing in front of them.

"Cousin!" Jonas shouted with excitement, but Thea only gave him a small nod of acknowledgment before she turned to Zac.

"You've been busy it looks like," she said with a smile.

"Well, one thing led to another," Zac sighed. "Are you here alone?"

"No, I went ahead of the group when one of your demonkin geomancers sensed some vibrations in the ground," she explained. "We thought it was a wolf pack that had strayed from the center of the forest."

"Well, let's go back. I have made some discoveries," Zac said.

"We still haven't mapped out the whole area. We have found a gate, but it actually attacked us the moment we got close," Thea said.

Zac frowned when he heard that the gate was actively attacking people. Didn't Leviala know about it, or did she hide it?

"That's okay. I've found everything we need for the next step of the plan," Zac said.

"Just like that?" Thea asked before she looked him up and down with a wry smile. "It really seems that the demon is right about one thing. Let you run off for just one day and you'll come back with massive gains."

"I'd be more than happy to be the one staying behind next time," Zac said with a shudder, thinking back to just how close it was for him to be turned into a part of a Void Creature's bodysuit.

They started walking in the direction of the glasshouse, and Zac helped catch Thea up to speed.

“So we’re going to those labs next?” Thea asked.

“I’m thinking that’s the move,” Zac nodded. “We might find useful things there, and it’s close to the Core sector where the treasure is. If the barriers really disappear when the Dimensional Seed matures we’ll be in a good starting position.”

“We’ll need to make some preparations then,” Thea mused before she added with a low voice. “By the way, I met with your friend, Ogras. Something seems to be wrong with him. He didn’t come with us to this place, he’s holed up in your compound. He hid his face in a big robe as well.”

Zac frowned at that, and the image of shadows repairing the hole in Ogras' chest resurged. The demon had seemed fine until now, but were there complications from his familiar fusing with him after all?