

The Fall 602

Chapter 602: Crowdfunding

Zac wasn't particularly worried if the demon's fusion somehow altered his constitution. Danger was always present on the road of cultivation, and getting fused with a shadow creature couldn't be as bad as getting stuck with two remnants in his head. But the demon's reaction was a cause for concern and something that he needed to investigate.

"I need to go back anyway to prepare a few things," Zac said after some thought. "I'll check in on him. If everything goes according to plan we'll set out from the glasshouse in a day or so."

"If you're going back you might want to speak with the Anointed as well," Thea said. "They're getting impatient, and they are already planning to force their way through the base. I tried to stop them but they don't listen to me."

Zac's eyes at the idea of thousands of war-crazy Zhix attacking the gates and the walls of the Mystic Realm. He had already seen how the base acted from small-scale infractions, and he also knew that it had far more deadly methods available after seeing how it dealt with the Collector. The Zhix might bring a calamity down on their heads if he didn't stop them.

"I'll talk with them," Zac said. "Can you help prepare this place for the arrival of a proper army?"

"What about the wolves?" Thea asked.

"Let's hope they're smart enough to stay away from the Zhix," Zac muttered. "Otherwise I think they'll be used as therapeutic punching bags."

Zac's group soon rejoined Thea's squad of vanguard scouts who all seemed extremely surprised to see the group emerge from the forest. Zac moved forward alone from there on out since there were others who could help the rescued scouts get back. He just took one last look at the group with a sense of accomplishment before he disappeared among the trees.

He knew that he couldn't save everyone and that there would inevitably be losses. But it still felt great to actually succeed in saving his people. So it was with newfound vigor he started to cover as much distance as he could with the help of [Loamwalker]. The quest told him to enter the Inner Laboratory before the Dimensional Seed matured, which was around 4 days from now. He didn't want to cut it too close either, so there was no time to waste.

He arrived at the hidden glasshouse and only briefly greeted the researchers there before he set out again. Having been given some reassurance from his travels with Leviala he no longer felt the need to go slow in the stable section of the Outer Ring, and he kept a rapid pace as he flashed forward over and over with the help of his movement skill.

That way it only took him two hours before he stood in front of the gate leading into the inner section. This time there was actually a group waiting on the other side when he opened it, standing behind two nasty-looking cannons that could only come from the Ishiate Tinkerers. Even Zac felt some pressure staring into the two half-meter wide barrels that were no doubt loaded with some energy-dense concoction.

Most of the guards clearly recognized him and quickly moved to push the cannons out of the way, but one of them stepped forward with his sword at the ready.

"Eat this," the guard gruffly said as he threw over a small package, drawing shocked glances from his colleagues.

"What?" Zac asked with confusion as he looked down at the bag.

"It's policy, stupid," the guard said as the other guards slowly started to inch away from him. "Don't want any of those lizard bastards to sneak inside."

"Keep up the good work," Zac said with a small smile as he ate the minty root.

Zac looked at the other guards next as he stepped past the cannons, and left some short parting words before he disappeared.

"Learn from this guy. No one is exempt, not even me."

A shudder in Zac's soul reminded him of a pressing issue, but he still hurried over to Biosphere 4 instead of his own compound. It was the place where most of the Zhix stayed, including the Zhix War Council. His arrival was met with bubbling excitement as the Zhix had long associated him with war. He was immediately led to a gathering hall, and one Anointed after another hurried inside.

Zac saw the eagerness in their eyes, and he didn't waste any time with small talk when everyone was gathered.

"I think I have an idea where the Dominators are," Zac said as he took out a crude map of the Research base.

He quickly started adding details to the mostly blank map, such as the Living Layer, the Inner Ring, and the Core. He then added the wasteland cutting through half of the base and the four major forces, completing the map.

"We are situated close to Clan Cartava, and we're the only natives they have encountered. To the east is the wasteland, and no one can live there for weeks, let alone months. Beyond that is the Lunar tribe, beastkin warriors who have been responsible for ambushing our people. The True Sky Faction is to the northwest of Clan Cartava, and they have been in contact with the Human Government.

"That leaves this place," Zac continued and pointed at the spot on the opposite side of the base compared with their own. "There is a golem-race living here. This should be the most likely location of the Dominators and their armies considering the werewolves have time to send scouting parties all the way here. If they're not there, they are somewhere close to the Lunar Clan."

"How do we get to this side, Warmaster?" Rhubat rumbled with a frown. "This place is confusing. It looks like a hive at first glance, but it is built following a completely different logic and philosophy. Our instincts have been proven wrong time and time again."

"There are two paths," Zac said. "Either passing the wasteland and making your way through the outer rim. But I'll tell you right now; if 100 sets out, only 5 will make it to the other side. I only reached the edge of that place when I set out to rescue our missing scouts, and I almost got killed many times over."

"The Zhix are not afraid of death, but we cannot take such losses. We would be too weakened to complete the crusade," another Anointed said with a shake of its head.

"The other option is to cut straight through the base," Zac said. "But that's currently impossible, but we might get our opportunity in four days. There will still be dangers though."

"We are ready. What can we do now?" Rhubat said.

"You should have heard about us discovering the large forest half a day from here, right?" Zac said.

"That place is our entrance to the inner sectors. From there we can take our armies past the Domestic Zone and enter the inner base.

"I think the core will be too dangerous for the general armies to enter because of the spatial rifts, but if we go along the inner band we can essentially walk a full circle around the base, visiting each faction starting with the True Sky Faction and ending with the Lunar Tribe. That way we'll find the Dominators sooner or later."

"What if these natives bar our path?" Rhubat rumbled.

"Nothing is more important than taking down the Dominators," Zac said without hesitation. "I've already told the Cartava Clan of the threat the Dominators represent. If these natives can help us against our common enemy, then great. If they move against us, we'll take them down."

"So the Final Crusade starts in four days," Rhubat said as he closed his eyes, and a dense aura of bloodthirst spread across the hall.

"Will you walk with us, Warmaster?" Vanexis asked next.

"...No, not immediately at least," Zac said. "I think Void's Disciple will head for the treasure in the Core, and I can't let him snatch it. He's already proven he's talented with the Dao of Space. Who knows how powerful he will become if he gets his hands on that thing? I've seen the destruction the Dimensional Seed has wrought on this base, no one can withstand it."

Worry flashed in Rhubat's eyes and he quickly nodded in agreement.

"I'm thinking that a small elite unit will head for the core sector as soon as we find a way to get inside there, and we'll meet up on the other side of the base after the army has made its way around. I'm heading out tomorrow in hopes of finding out more," Zac said.

"Do you need our assistance?" Rhubat asked.

"It's impossible, I'm afraid," Zac said. "I managed to get my hands on a map to the inner laboratories, but the path goes through pipes and air ducts. You guys are too big to squeeze inside."

The meeting went on for a bit longer, though making any exact plans was hard when so much was in the air. But the general plan was set. A large part of the army would start the transfer to the Lunar Forest, leaving just a smaller defensive squad in charge of this outer sector. They would be in charge of stopping any attempts of the natives to force their way outside, and if need be trigger the destabilizers that Kenzie had installed.

He left after 20 minutes, heading for Biosphere 1. However, a familiar figure caught up to Zac just as he was about to leave the Zhix's domiciles.

It was Ibtep, and they threw down an isolation array the moment they arrived next to Zac.

"I did it," Ibtep said as soon as the Array activated. "I have gathered 8 Billion Nexus Coins. Do the offer still stand?"

"What? EIGHT BILLION?" Zac sputtered, shocked to hear that the Zhix liaison somehow had become even wealthier than himself. "How is that possible?"

"Almost no Zhix has used that currency so far, and they hold it in no regard. Cosmic Energy might not be seen as corruption any longer, but it still isn't something that the Zhix can embrace in a year or two. When Zhix warriors heard I had a shot at helping the Anointed they immediately donated everything they had accumulated without any further questions, and most Zhix have gathered over a million coins after fighting the unliving and the traitors," Ibtep explained.

Zac hesitated for a few seconds, but he eventually produced the teleportation token along with the Clan Zethaya VIP Token.

"This token will let you meet the Alchemist. Remember, be careful. I don't know what world this token will take you to, but there will definitely be D-Grade beings and perhaps even stronger cultivators. Keep your head down, don't offend anyone," Zac said, and he added something after some thought. "You can tell the Zethaya Clan that I'm sorry I couldn't come in person, I am busy stabilizing my foundation after breaking through."

Zac hoped that small addition would decrease the chance of Ibtep getting double-crossed. There was no such thing as benevolent forces, and the only thing that kept young elites somewhat safe was the risk of future retaliation. However, those that walked the path of the elite were even more likely than normal cultivators to get stuck in bottlenecks.

That's was why so many factions had the guts to go after the Eveningtide Asura even after he had proven his strength in the Tower of Eternity. They figured that someone that had such a heavy foundation might not even make it to D-Grade. Their bet obviously proved to be a huge loss, but most such gambles ended up okay.

But if Zac could spread the fact that he had already evolved to E-Grade, he might plant the seeds of hesitation in the minds of those who were considering going after his secrets or Earth.

"Only the mission matter. I will go straight to the pill store and then return," Ibtep nodded.

"One more thing," Zac added after some thought. "See if you can find out what's going on in the Sector, if there are any news about me or The Great Redeemer. Our planet needs to know what to expect. But your safety comes first."

"Understood," Ibtep said, though he was almost stamping in place out of impatience. "I have to go now before the gate closes."

"Good luck," Zac smiled. "We'll deal with the things on this end."

lbtep scurried toward Biosphere 1 the next moment, no doubt heading straight for the tunnel leading to the outer world. Zac arrived just a few moments later, instead heading for his cordoned-off sector. The reason he needed to go back from the glasshouse was simple; he really needed a round in his Soul Strengthening Array.

Utilizing the energy of the remnants always came at a cost, and the weird cracks hidden in his body were only part of it. His soul was unsettled, and he needed to stabilize it before setting course for the Inner Sectors. After all, there was a good chance that his next outing would lead him straight from the Inner Lab to the Core, and he needed to be in peak condition for whatever waited there.

However, he only took a step inside his courtyard before he stopped, immediately sensing a familiar presence.

"Where did you run off to?" a dour voice said from a secluded corner of his courtyard. "People were starting to freak out."

"Okay, what's going on with you?" Zac said with a frown, ignoring the question. "Do we need to be worried?"

His question wasn't without merit, as the demon had undergone an almost shocking transformation since they met just a few days ago.