

The Fall 606

Chapter 606: Inner Layer

"You're back," Thea said as spotted Zac walking over. "You're looking better."

"Finally had some time to rest up a bit," Zac smiled. "Have there been any problems with the wolves?"

"Not really, a few of them appeared in the distance, but a bunch of Anointed scared them away. I think the Zhix were actually a bit disappointed," Thea said with a shake of her head.

"Wouldn't be surprised," Zac snorted. "Are you ready to set out?"

"I'm ready, but Billy will be sitting this one out," Thea said.

"Oh, why?" Zac asked with confusion. "Is he hurt?"

He had already asked about Emily and Joanna from Kenzie, and while neither of them was in critical condition, they weren't ready to set out again either. Emily was still unconscious after overdrafting her Cosmic Energy, but she was being continuously fed healing pills and nurtured by healers. Not having those two available to join the army was already a big loss, and losing an elite like Billy would definitely weaken his army.

It was a shame for Billy as well, considering where they were. If anyone could find something suitable in a place like this, it would probably be Billy, considering he was a descendant of one of the races brought here.

"No, nothing like that. He suddenly fell asleep and a lot of energy is entering his body. I think he has some sort of epiphany," Thea said as he nodded over at a tent. "I had some people drag him over there."

"Oh, guess he found an opportunity of his own. Well, he can catch up with the real armies later," Zac said.

The two headed over to a command tent where the Anointed had already gathered, and they shored up their plans over the next twenty minutes. It wasn't really anything too complicated. The Zhix would set out the moment the treasure matured no matter whether Zac had come back by that point or not, heading for the inner area.

They could technically set out earlier than that, but there were simply too many barriers security checks in the way right now. They were severely lacking in understanding of this place compared to the natives, and Kenzie couldn't be everywhere putting out fires. However, a C-Grade treasure maturing had huge ramifications according to what he had learned, to the point that they could transform whole planets.

This was a risk, but also their chance. Everything pointed to the Dimensional Seed being somehow integrated with the base itself, and the terrifying outburst of power should knock out most security systems. It would both remove the advantage of the natives while simultaneously giving them free passage toward the Inner Layer.

Hopefully, Zac's group would be able to meet up with them there, but if not, then a small group of elite Anointed would enter the core while the rest would start looking for the Dominator's armies. They

would be assisted by all the different factions of the Atwood Alliance, but the goal was for them to only deal with the followers of the Dominators, with Zac's group dealing with Inevitability and Void's Disciple themselves.

It was a risk for their army to travel without any real powerhouses to shore up their ranks, but both Zac and Rhubat saw no choice but to take the gamble that at least Void's Disciple wouldn't waste his time in the outer reaches, rather rushing for the treasure in the core. It was most likely the same with all factions that chose to head for the riches in the core, like the cultists and the Lunar Tribe.

That left the natives, but Zac felt that the Anointed with their War Arrays and great ferocity would be able to protect themselves. The natives should be smarter than to enter an all-out war against their armies considering their main goal should be escaping.

But for now, the army would finish setting up this defensive perimeter before creating a final one at the main gate leading toward the inner reaches. It was the gate that the Cartava Clan wanted them to open, making Zac a bit reluctant to use it, but there were no alternatives. It was the only path leading inside that they had found except the Lunar Tribe's maps. But those backdoor pathways were simply too narrow for both an army and the hulking anointed.

The two returned to Ogras and Kenzie who had finished her readings, and just the four of them set out accompanied by a squad of a hundred elites that would set up the initial perimeter by the gate. These elites were the cream of the crop, and they had no problem keeping up with Zac's small group even when he exerted some effort.

Their breakneck pace allowed them to reach the inner gate in just six hours, and even the group of Anointed were panting a bit by that point. The larger Anointed were fine though, as were Ogras and Thea.

"This is the place," Zac said as he nodded at the gate. "We will keep going for a bit longer."

"How about you let me try modifying this door?" Kenzie interjected. "We don't actually know what will happen when the treasure wakes up. What if the door stays the same? Isn't Tier-4 clearance required to enter? Only we have that"

Zac looked up at the towering wall with hesitation for a few seconds until he eventually nodded in agreement.

"You guys stay here," Zac said to the scout. "I'll protect her if the wall goes crazy."

The two walked up to the gate, but neither tried to open it. He felt he had reached an accord with Leviala by this point, but he still didn't want to bet that there was a trap waiting on the other side. Kenzie infused a bit more Base Power into the tablet as she hooked it up to the gate itself rather than the terminal that was a few meters up in the air. Zac looked at his sister inquisitively, wondering if she really knew what she was doing.

"The frame is directly connected to the terminal," Kenzie shrugged. "It's all the same to Jeeves whether he gains access to the gate or the terminal itself."

"Is... Jeeves actually entering these things, or is it just telling you what to do?" Zac asked hesitantly.

"It's connected to them like this tablet is connected to the wall. He doesn't actually enter the wall or whatever. Why? What's wrong?" Kenzie asked with a slightly distracted voice as most of her focus was reserved for the screen.

"The administrator," Zac said. "It might be a problem if the Base AI consider Jeeves a threat. Jeeves is probably higher-quality tech, but it's still just F-Grade. Meanwhile, I saw the Administrator fight with what I think was a C-Grade monstrosity on even footing."

"I considered that, but these gates are completely isolated from the looks of it. Besides, Jeeves is essentially masquerading as the tablet itself, we shouldn't be exposed even if that AI was directly looking at what we are doing," Kenzie said.

"Fine," Zac slowly nodded. "But you can't do things like this in the core. The Administrator is actively controlling those parts according to Leviala. No point in risking it unless absolutely necessary."

"Leviala?" Kenzie said with an impish smile. "First-name basis?"

"Just focus," Zac said with a roll of his eyes.

"It's already done," Kenzie giggled as she retrieved the tablet, leaving one of her communication dongles behind. "This gate will only require Class-3 clearance to open now, while still having the same security protocols as before. Jeeves even activated a dormant anti-tampering protocol to make hacking harder. If the Cartava Clan couldn't get through before, they definitely shouldn't be able to now."

"Good job," Zac nodded. "I think you might be our biggest ace in this place."

"It's good that you finally understand," Kenzie said with a wink. "Not everything can be solved with an axe."

"Well, not everything, more than one would expect," Zac smiled.

Zac's group left the scouts behind after confirming no wolves were lurking nearby, heading straight for their next target; a nondescript grate almost twenty meters into the air, barely visible on the wall from the ground. It took them almost two hours to get there, even after increasing their pace. The grate was a 'swarm pipe' according to Leviala, a small outlet that released swarms of microscopic machines whose job was to kill any unwanted flora and pollinate the wanted species.

However, these gardener-machines had either stopped working or they had been blocked by structural damage further inside the base, as those machines hadn't been seen for centuries. And now, with the spatial expansion, the pipe was wide enough to allow people to squeeze through, albeit barely.

"Is it really necessary to take this circuitous path?" Kenzie asked as she looked down on the mapper with some hesitation. "I'm sure we could find a path without squeezing through claustrophobic pipes and run-off grates."

"Might as well, it should only add a few hours' travel time compared to a more direct route. And the path doesn't only take into account these kinds of hidden paths, but also spatial anomalies. There should be some reason as to why the werewolves chose these paths rather than the normal corridors," Zac said. "I want to avoid any spatial tears for as long as we can. I don't know if that thing in the Void is still angry."

“Fine,” Kenzie shrugged.

Zac quickly took out a series of daggers with flat handles and quickly infused each of them with a smidgeon of Base Power before he threw them into the wall. As expected, the knives embedded themselves into the Memorysteel without issue, forming a set of steps all the way up to the gate.

Kenzie was about to jump up to open it, but she was stopped by Zac who went up himself with his tablet. His sister seemed to be confident in Jeeves’ abilities, but he wasn’t so certain. Leandra had warned him of the Mystic Realm in their short talk after he evolved, and Zac was worried that his mother’s warning was based on her desire to keep Jeeves rather than her children safe.

Perhaps there were things in this place that could harm Jeeves, and doing so harm Kenzie as well. He had witnessed the power this base still possessed after all these years, and connecting Jeeves to the wrong terminal might cause the AI to overload.

However, Zac quickly realized that opening the lid to a grate was very different from opening a hidden gate with the help of Leviala. A series of weird boxes appeared, but none of them looked like the one he had pressed before. Touching the token against the tablet didn’t help either, so Zac could only jump down in defeat and let his sister deal with it.

The following hours passed without any surprises as they followed the detailed map left behind by the Werewolf scouts. They quickly realized just how much larger the Living Layer was compared to the Outer Ring. They weren’t able to move very quickly due to moving through uncharted pathways, but they had still walked a depth that was twice that of the Outer Ring with most of the map still remaining.

It wasn’t solely due to how the base was constructed either. Part of it definitely came from the spatial expansion that only seemed to be increasing in severity on their way in. When they entered the pipe they were forced to walk hunched-over, but after a few hours the pipes were wide enough for them to walk upright without issue.

The pipe took a circuitous path on its way to the Inner Layer, and with the lack of natural lighting, it quickly became extremely claustrophobic. Ogras repeatedly muttered about blasting a hole in the wall and walking through the normal corridors, and Thea stopped reprimanding him after an hour.

“That’s enough whining,” Kenzie eventually said, the tablet in her hands illuminating her face. “We’ll be exiting this pipe soon. It seems the werewolves created an exit that leads to a warehouse. From there we will take the normal paths for a while.”

Kenzie was the whose mood hadn't been dampened by the pitch-black and cramped tunnels, probably since she had spent most time holed up in her workshops lately. She was also constantly using the tablet in her hands, and one box after another flashed in an endless cycle. They had stopped now and then as well, allowing Kenzie to keep installing her communication modules in the walls.

They finally reached the marked spot Kenzie mentioned and found clear signs of outside interference. What had once been a small vent had been expanded into a proper grate with hinges and everything. Zac opened it up and peered inside, and found that the warehouse was even bigger than the place where the Lunar Tribe had set up their Relay Station.

The room was almost impossibly large, and their point of ingress was almost fifty meters in the air. This place was different from what they were used to for another reason as well; there were thousands of metallic boxes neatly arranged across the wall and in aisles across the room. The boxes were each almost thirty meters tall, though that likely meant they were about two meters before the spatial expansion took place.

Zac's eyes lit up with excitement, and he jumped down after getting a go-ahead from his sister. Ogras was right on his heels, and he looked at the massive craters with greed. Thea and Kenzie quickly made their way down as well, and they all walked over to the closest box.

"Do you think it contains those big controllable robots?" Ogras asked before he looked at Kenzie askance. "Someone destroyed the ones we had."

"Well, someone had to keep the Undead at bay while you were off having fun in the Tower of Eternity," Kenzie shot right back.

Zac didn't mind their bickering as he looked down the aisle that was so long that it almost looked like an illusion. He didn't care if the boxes contained mechas or raw materials. As long as they contained anything of even a little bit of value on the outside, then they had just struck a motherlode.