

The Fall 617

Chapter 617: Like Moths to a Flame

Leviala looked on at the destruction from her drone chair with bleakness, her sight only made possible by using [Heaven's Eyes] as her physical eyes had already become useless. Guilt and self-loathing filled her as plumes of fire rose to the sky, and the air vibrated from the unending barrage of attacks.

"War always has casualties, child," Tictus sighed as he kept tapping away on his drone-controlling tablet next to her. "I know you feel this is a mistake, and it might very well be. But the elders are not acting without reason. We know there has been an infiltration, and we know that this outside force might not necessarily have been aiming at us. But we still chose this path, your grandfather still chose to step down voluntarily even after your account. Do you know why?"

"Freedom. The fact that the outsiders were as powerful as you described only spurred the elders into action. What would have happened if we did as you said? We would be forcibly conscripted into a war that was not of our choosing, stuck in this hell as the world around us crumbled. Who do you think this Lord Atwood would see as expendable? What role would we have in his private crusade?"

"But more importantly, this outcome was already cemented the moment that Zachary Atwood closed the door to our prison cell. The same is already happening over at the True Sky Faction. It is a basic instinct to wish to be free," Tictus said. "Your sacrifice gave us a fighting chance at least. But you'd be wrong to blame yourself for anything."

Leviala weakly nodded, even that small movement causing a wave of blinding pain in her mind.

"We... Should hurry," Leviala whispered. "I have a bad feeling."

They should already have been out by now, but Clan Cartava had met setback after setback on their path to freedom. First were the corridors that turned rabid, killing dozens and destroying a large chunk of their mechanized troops the moment they reached the gate to this forest. It was no doubt the work of Kenzie, the mysterious sister of Zachary Atwood.

It turned out that they had kept their guard up even before her betrayal.

But that was just the start. They had been forced to detonate their last remaining spatial bomb to pass just the gate, something that had been meant as a last-ditch weapon to quickly annihilate the opposition without any losses. Now they had been forced into a protracted battle against these lunatics that were far more powerful than was normal considering their low levels.

The outsiders had even managed to enlist help from the Lunar Wolves, with thousands of beasts trying to rip through their ranks.

"The elders are still restoring their reserves after pushing back that army of giants. And I still can't believe a Titan managed to survive somehow. I wonder if that means some of our ancestors made it out alive as well," Tictus muttered.

"Still," Leviala sighed. "It feels like a darkness is coming ever closer, threatening to swallow us up at any moment."

"It's not much longer. Their shields are on the verge of crumbling. Ten more minutes and we'll be able to launch a final assault, utterly crushing them. From there it's just one sprint to the gates of freedom."

Foolish.

How utterly foolish he had been, to believe that he could stand on an even footing with these natives on the basis of the millions of people he controlled. He coughed out a mouthful of blood as he crawled up to a sitting position. It provided vantage for him to witness the fires that stretched across the horizon.

The True Sky Faction was supposed to be like them by all accounts, a fragmented group whose main advantage was numbers rather than individual strength. They had a council as a deciding organ, and there were even elections every decade by the sounds of things.

But the moment they found a weakness, they pounced like a pack of rabid beasts, forcing their way through the spatial rifts using some unknown means, storming toward their spatial tunnel. The only reason their soldiers weren't completely overrun was the timely assistance of the tide of beasts that were attracted by the smell of blood. The blood of his soldiers.

Even that was just a delay of the inevitable though. The New World Government had worked tirelessly to unearth as many weapon caches as possible over the past year, taking everything they could get their hands on. US Army Stockpiles or old Soviet munitions belonging to African Warlords, they took it all.

But their rockets had barely managed to take out a third of the far superior machines of the True Sky Faction, and when their cultivators eventually made their move it was already over. A few ambassadors had managed to escape, but their defensive measures worked against them this time. The moment someone in the outer base heard of what was going on they triggered the trap, closing the tunnel and abandoning their people.

Of course, Thomas Fisher had an override, but it wasn't like he would have a chance to use it seeing as how he was surrounded by a diverse group of aliens.

"Human, we know you have a method to reopen the tunnel. Tell us how to remove the restrictions, and you and your people can join the True Sky Faction," a furry monkeyman said, his fur silver and bristled from advanced age. "Together we'll deal with the other factions, creating a foundation that can stand tall in the multiverse."

"Joining you bastards?" Fischer coughed with a wan smile as he infused some energy into the hidden fractal inscribed on the back of his tooth. "I'm not worthy. Besides, I can't have you treacherous bastards running around on Earth."

"Treacherous? You kept eliciting our help in return for our freedom, but you never delivered on your end. We've lost hundreds of warriors and three settlements keeping those cultists at bay. Now the world is ending, and we have run out of both options and patience," the burly humanoid said with a growl as he looked down at Thomas's wretched form. "Now, the exit."

"You can forget it. What life would we lead with bastards like you lording over us? I'd rather leave our people to our own tyrant. At least he's born in the United States."

"I gave you a choice, but never mind," the old cultivator sighed as he turned to one of his companions. "Search his mind."

Thomas's heart thumped with fear at the prospect of getting mind-raped by some alien, but he quickly calmed down again, taking a steadying breath. He still couldn't understand how things came to this. He still remembered the sense of purpose he had back then, how he had led his people through the Tutorial before creating the foundation for his people to survive.

When had his goals changed? When had his convictions changed?

It felt like his humanity had been chipped away piece by piece by the temptation of power. He usually blamed the lizardmen and the insane insectoids for his actions. But in his heart of hearts, he knew better. This new world was poisonous, and he had gladly drunk its putrid waters.

Perhaps it was for the best that it came to this. He could die while he still maintained at least some of his humanity. He knew he was greedy and scheming, but never let it be known that he didn't care for his country. This would be his final gift.

The rest would be up to Zachary Atwood.

"Have you heard of Atomic Bombs?" Thomas laughed as he looked up at the aliens before he activated the array. "They're banned outside, but who would have thought it was possible to assemble one in this place?"

The eyes of the alien widened with comprehension.

"Run!"

But it was too late. A sun was born, blossoming just a few hundred meters away, and it would soon swallow them all.

"Trash, what kind of warrior kills themselves instead of fighting?" Cervantes snorted and threw the corpse into a wall before he turned to Yoros. "Have you confirmed it?"

"Yes," the shaman quickly nodded as he ripped the bone-spike out of the pretender's head. "Their leaders entered through another portal."

"Shame. And the item?" Cervantes asked as he scanned through the Cosmos Sacks.

It was infuriating. These weaklings possessed a level of wealth that beggared his own, and these were just some insignificant scouts. Meanwhile, he had been forced to cultivate in this cursed environment, living on run-off and scraps like a rat. He would have formed his core a long time ago if it wasn't for his wretched circumstances.

But fate was finally turning.

"They call it a Dimensional Seed. Their leaders seem to want it to reach the C-Grade, but it can be used to create a private world. A new home for our Tribe?" the shaman hesitantly said, looking at his leader in hopes to discern his thoughts.

"C-Grade or a private world," Cervantes mused. "Well, my useless nephew failed with his task, but things might not be over yet. The answers lie at the Core."

"Fate congregates toward the center," Yoros agreed. "Something enormous is brewing."

"Good," Cervantes nodded as he turned to his clansmen standing in wait.

The whole room was still illuminated by lunar splendor after having activated the ceremony, with thousands of his kin radiating a ruthless aura. The killing intent was palpable as well thanks to the corpses of the hundred pretenders lying on the ground.

"I know you all yearn for freedom," he said. "To bask in the glory of the true moon. But we have suffered in this hellhole for millennia. If we try to leave now, we are just victims who managed to escape. That is not the Lunar Tribe. No, we will seize this moment and turn calamity into opportunity. Our people will not have died in vain. We'll strike at the core."

A war-hungry roar emerged from his tribe, and Cervantes nodded with a grin. However, Yoros walked over to him with a hesitant look on his face.

"We should hurry. Something changed a few hours ago. The fluctuations are growing erratic."

Zac flashed through the throng of people with the help of [Loamwalker]. It wasn't like he didn't want to help them, but what could he do except rush to the frontlines? He ran as fast as his legs could carry him and his sister, but each face he passed was imprinted on his mind, building his furious momentum to even greater heights.

This was a cruel reminder of the realities of the Multiverse. He and Clan Cartava didn't really have any great reason to become enemies, but sometimes that wasn't enough to become friends. Conflicting views and lack of trust had led to this miserable outcome, and the Church of Everlasting Dao was clearly adept in muddying the waters even further. And there was nothing he could do but to finish things once and for all.

He was still hundreds of meters away from the gate, but he could still feel the deep explosions in the distance as their force transferred through the Memorysteel walls. The incessant tremors were ample proof of the intensity of the battle taking place on the other side. They finally reached the gate, and it actually opened itself as a group of bloodied soldiers were about to retreat.

"Lord Atwood!" a chorus of voices shouted, but Zac's eyes were on the defensive perimeter outside the glasshouse.

It almost looked like the whole sky had been lit on fire.

A constant bombardment assailed the defensive array. It was still holding, but it was obviously on its last legs. Cracks kept appearing, allowing a series of beams to slip inside and wreak havoc on the temporary town inside. Only the glasshouse was unscathed, the reinforced glass seemingly immune to Technocrat energy weapons.

A hundred Anointed stood in a line behind the barrier, a thick stream of energy emerging from their bodies to strengthen the shields. They were each supported by a squad of Zhix warriors who infused them in power. They in turn were supported by a group of supportive cultivators who did everything from protecting them from errant attacks to improving their energy transference.

Emily was one of them, her face pale as she held her hands against a totem pole she had conjured.

The physical wall was halfway crumbled already, with most of the Ishiate cannons in ruins. Still, over a hundred warriors stood on top of the wall-walk, desperately sending out attacks as others ran to reinforce the cracks in the barriers.

Zac flashed forward, appearing next to Joanna on top of the wall just as she sent out a storm of fractal weapons through the shield. However, Zac saw how they were quickly destroyed by an onslaught of lasers.

"Thank god you're here," she exclaimed when she saw Zac appear. "I don't know how much longer we would last without you. Those machines are just too annoying."

Zac looked out across the battlefield and saw what Joanna was talking about. The whole forest outside had been leveled to give way to a massive mechanical army. The flying drones were just one of the machines the Cartava Clan used to fight their war for them. There were just as many drones that looked completely different, like flying red eggs.

They didn't have any weapons, but it was obvious that they were rather there to form an enormous red canopy of shields that covered the whole army. There were also landbound machines that packed a wallop, along with a few robots whose function Zac couldn't immediately discern. As for the Cartava clansmen themselves, they actually stood out of reach, letting the machines do their bidding.

The mechanical army was clearly the most immediate threat, and he turned to his sister who looked at the army with greed. She had already taken out her tablet and she was tapping away with fervor. However, she suddenly froze as her eyes widened in horror, just as the drones broke the carefully arranged line a few hundred meters away from the barrier.

They all suddenly shot straight toward the wall, and even Zac could sense a rapidly accumulating energy in the machines.

"They're booby-trapped! They activated a self-destruct protocol the moment I connected with them. I can't deactivate it, they'll blow up this whole town!"