

The Fall 625

Chapter 625: Under Attack

Zac immediately rushed back when hearing the commotion, fearing that the mysterious entity that had snatched up his people from the bridge had returned. But thankfully they hadn't been ambushed by the Collector or any rival faction, but rather the base itself. The walls had gone crazy, frenziedly attacking a group of cultivators who desperately activated one defensive talisman after another to stay alive.

The halo of [Conformation of Supremacy] appeared behind Zac's back as he flashed forward. He used the avatar of the axe this time, imbuing each swing a great force and sharpness, allowing him to crush the spikes as they tried to stab at everything that moved.

The cultivators were all elites as well and they organized their efforts to block the attacks. They normally wouldn't have been strong enough to deal with something like this, but Zac quickly realized that the attacks were pretty weakened compared to what he was used to. A series of cracks echoed out a second later, and the walls fell apart, exposing a neighboring corridor on one side and an empty storage room on the other.

Zac bent down and picked up a piece of Memorysteel, and found that it was quite malleable.

"What happened?" Zac asked with a frown as he turned to a panting soldier.

"I don't know," the bloodied soldiers said. "The walls suddenly started vibrating. Its surface looked like water during an earthquake. Then it just started attacking."

"I think the programming in the research base is unraveling because of the state of this base," Kenzie said as she came running. "This might not be the last time."

"We'll see if we can gravitate towards open platforms as much as possible," Zac nodded. "For now, have everyone keep watch for any changes in the surroundings."

The group set out again, but the scouts soon came back with the news that they wouldn't be able to reach the platform the way they were going. Zac hesitated for a few seconds before he walked over to the Anointed.

"Help me destroy the walls. They seem to have limited energy now. As long as we can cause enough damage they should crumble," Zac said. "Finding a new path would waste too much time."

"Let us handle it, Warmaster," Rhubat said. "We know you must have expended a lot of energy during the previous battles."

He turned to a group of Anointed the next moment and they nodded in understanding. A squad of a hundred Zhix followed behind, and four massive seals appeared in the air. The whole section started shaking a moment later as the Anointed unleashed an all-out barrage on the walls. The seals pretty much acted as hammers, slamming into it over and over.

The spikes were crushed as soon as they formed and the walls had to keep expending energy to reform the massive dents and cracks that appeared. Finally, after just 40 seconds, the walls crumbled, providing them access to a neighboring corridor.

From there on out they kept moving quickly, taking the path of least resistance where they either forced their way through the walls or followed the corridors depending on what seemed fastest. Reaching the third platform went without issue, apart from some disagreements about who would go first. Only after Zac and the Anointed quashed any dissent could they get across the bridge, a 50-meter wide strip of land.

The third platform continued with Memorysteel walls for ten minutes until they suddenly gave way to large fields of farmland. It seemed to have been recently harvested though, and Zac realized they had reached the sector the Cartava Clan lived in.

"I'll go ahead," Zac suddenly said before he turned into a blur as he flickered back and forth, running to every corner of the fields over the next 30 minutes as the army kept running straight ahead.

He even entered a series of side paths and corridors, but Zac couldn't find what he was looking for; the glasshouses that held the race-boosting treasures. Zac could only sigh in disappointment and rejoin the others. Zac knew it was a longshot that a bunch of valuable natural treasures would be waiting for him in this place, but he couldn't help himself from making sure.

But the Cartava Clan had clearly picked everything clean before they set off. He had got his hands on two of the Cosmos Sacks of the elders though, so it wasn't impossible that some of the stored items were the race-boosting fruits Leviala mentioned. But now was not the time to properly go through his haul.

The group kept going, and they soon passed the farmland biospheres to enter the corridors again. However, this place was different compared to what they had encountered so far. It wasn't the empty shells of the outer sector, but it also wasn't the abandoned opulence of the inner layer.

Most importantly, the tunnels were drastically transformed from the bare aesthetic. There were paintings, mosaics, statues, benches adorning the walls, and the roof was covered in what looked like a starry sky. All the art looked somewhat recent as well, no doubt additions left by the Cartava clan. A huge crack in the wall allowed Zac to see a vast warehouse, spanning hundreds of meters even after the spatial expansion was gone.

Inside was a whole neighborhood of small Memorysteel townhouses in straight rows, forming a series of parallel streets. The houses were all made from metal, but they were somehow dyed in bright colors to bring life to the section. Some of the houses even had small gardens.

Large broken spheres hung in the sky, probably a source of light that had broken during the massive shake-ups. In fact, quite a few of the houses had fallen apart, some missing whole walls, while others were essentially unscathed. Zac guessed that repairs and upgrades had been made with spatially expanded materials, which then shrunk during the upheavals.

It was clear that they had appeared in the proper residential districts of the Cartava Clan, though they were still just at the edge. Those houses likely belonged to families who worked the fields, while the real elites lived somewhere further inside.

Zac and his followers didn't get much further though before he suddenly stopped in his tracks, the hairs on his arms standing on end. There was no hesitation as the chains shot out from [Love's Bond] to form a wide net that pushed everyone back as Zac desperately retreated.

“WATCH OUT!” Zac roared as he threw out a set of defensive talismans before summoning [Nature’s Barrier] and infused it with the Fragment of the Bodhi. A series of massive explosions quickly followed and a scorching heat slammed into the frontlines the next moment.

Layers after layers of emerald leaves were incinerated, but Zac kept infusing Cosmic Energy to create a storm of leaves that filled the whole corridor. Others were thankfully quick on the uptake, and a series of barriers quickly sprung up to lessen his burden. Only half a minute later did the inferno subside, allowing them to breathe out in relief.

“Those explosions were definitely not a part of the base,” Kenzie said as she looked down at her tablet. “I think we triggered some trap when we entered this section.”

“Why did they boobytrap their homes?” Joanna said with incomprehension.

“Revenge,” one of the Anointed said. “These natives fight without honor, breaking bonds without pause. I can see them doing something like this.”

Zac nodded in agreement. He wouldn’t put it past them to leave something like this behind to strike at either him or Lunar Tribe.

“They might have left some protections behind just in case. The clan must have rushed toward the exit the moment Leviala returned with the Spatial Drill,” Kenzie shrugged. “Some things of value were definitely left behind, and they might have wanted to protect these items in case they were able to return in the future.”

“In either case, let’s go around the town instead of through it. There might be good things in the Cartava territory, but there’s no time to waste on something like that now,” Zac said as he turned to his sister. “Or is this the only way to the bridge?”

“We can take a detour, but we need to hurry!” Kenzie said with worry in her eyes. “That blast weakened the dimensional protections. We lost something like 30 minutes.”

“All the more reason to take the long path,” Zac said. “If there is one bomb there is probably more of them lying in wait.”

They immediately returned to the fields and chose a different path, which allowed them to reach the fourth platform without any further issue. The walls did try to attack them a few times as their defensive algorithms went haywire though, but that was far preferable to the powerful incendiaries before. The next platform was also almost completely transformed by the Cartava clan, though this one seemed to house an industrial zone. The warehouses had been emptied out and turned into factories that seemed to house some sort of 3D-printers.

The machines were made from Memorysteel like everything else, but they were clearly not of Technocrat origin. They were far-too-crude for that, yet they were still probably decades or ahead of Earth’s technological progress. Kenzie’s eyes glistened as she looked at the homebrewed machinery, but Zac dragged her away.

There was no point in risking their lives for some machines that would just piss the System off even further. It had already marked this place as a “Taboo Undertaking”, so Zac wouldn’t be surprised as every piece of technology inside this place was branded some way or another.

Still, it took them over an hour to pass this island, partly out of fear of more traps and partly due to the complex layout. There were also quite a few security measures that took some time to crack since they were modified by the Cartava Clan and already supposed to be disconnected from the main AI hub.

Finally they reached the edge of the island. But just as Zac was about to lead the group across he stopped as a thunderous sound erupted far in the distance.

Zac looked over, and his eyes widened in shock when he saw one platform after another fall apart. It was like a chain reaction that had started somewhere close to the mountain, and it almost made it all the way to the outermost platforms. A few islands survived in the destruction thanks to having multiple bridges, but over twenty plots of lands had crumbled in an instant.

“What was that?!” Joanna wheezed.

“I think someone has reached the mountain already,” Zac frowned. “They are destroying the bridges and killing the competition.”

The series of platforms that fell apart was quite far away, but that didn’t stop Zac and the others from feeling a creeping sense of dread. It wasn’t all that hard to destroy the bridges that spanned the void, and there were only so many platforms between themselves and whoever had enacted that ruthless plan.

Seeing dozens of islands just fall apart like that put everyone under a tremendous pressure, and Zac immediately crossed with his sister. The other side was just a short corridor that led to what looked like a large square that you could see in something like a mall. Dilapidated storefronts lined the sides, and a broken glass dome gave them a glimpse of the void outside.

“These Technocrats really knew how to live it up,” Emily muttered as she entered behind Zac. “I can’t believe they have this kind of place inside a research base.”

Zac looked over at the teenager, relieved to see that she looked better. She had been carried by one of the Valkyries for most of the trip, completely drained from using her skills on the whole army. It felt like he needed to find some way for Emily to improve her energy reserves so that she didn’t get this drained all the time.

“I guess you have to add all kinds of things for people to not go insane,” Zac shrugged. “After all, people probably spent centuries in this place back when it was running properly.”

More and more warriors quickly crossed the bridge and the entrance to the square was quickly filling up even when it was far larger than any similar structure on Earth.

“What direction should we go, Warm-“ Rhubat said, but the Zhix stopped as it suddenly turned toward the broken-down glass ceiling in the sky.

Zac didn’t understand what was wrong, but he suddenly felt an uncomfortable pressure as the protective film outside the dome bulged downward like something was pushing to come through. And he knew all-too-well what kind of thing that would be.

He could only pray it wasn’t the Collector.

“Incoming! Spread out! Non-combat classes and support staff enter the side corridors!” Zac roared, and the soldiers quickly made a defensive ring around the square.

The barrier cracked the next moment as a huge miscreation fell onto the square with a massive thud. Zac panicked as he looked up at the ceiling, but he breathed out in relief when he saw that the film had repaired itself after the Void Creature had pushed through. Only then did he focus on the target at hand.

The Void Creature looked a bit like a short pitch-black caterpillar, but it had spindly legs all around its body rather than in sets on the bottom. Its body was almost thirty meters long, but it was at least ten meters across as well, giving it a stocky appearance. Its face was just a black vortex that emitted a black gas, and Zac estimated it might actually be a Half-Step D-Grade creature.

However, it was clearly not used to existing in this kind of dimension, as it kept shuddering as the long legs on its back twitched like the creature was in its death throes.

That didn’t mean it was completely restrained though, and all its legs suddenly pushed forward in a motion that reminded Zac of how octopi swim. It probably moved about in a very similar fashion as it floated around in the void. Of course, this time only the legs on the bottom provided any real traction, but it still almost turned into a black blur as it shot forward.

Straight at Zac.