

## The Fall 629

### Chapter 629: Final Stretch

"This is the final stretch, keep going!" Zac shouted as he urged the warriors around him to keep running.

The faces of the soldiers were pallid masks of exhaustion by this point, but they kept putting one foot ahead of the other as they gripped Nexus Crystals in their hands. The last ten hours had pushed them to their very limits even though they weren't the ones who carried the main burden of their mad dash.

The problem was the increasingly sparse Cosmic Energy. It kept getting worse, to the point that there was barely any left at all by now. Just maintaining a superhuman speed was a constant source of drain, and with battles peppered in these people were running on fumes by this point.

After all, most of these people didn't even have a tenth of Zac's monstrous reserves, and the fact that they were cultivators didn't help in the slightest in this energy-sparse environment.

But there was no option but to keep going, even if they were out of strength. They were all-too-aware of the situation. They had heard the crashing sounds of collapsing islands coming ever closer. They had seen the huge golden flames at the foot of the mountain, causing a shocking chain of destruction that ended with a whole section of islands being decimated.

And their platform was next.

There was only a vast emptiness to their left when they crossed the last bridge. The neighboring islands were all gone. It was lucky that they had decided to run diagonally across the islands in an attempt to reach a more western point of the mountain. Otherwise, they would have already been thrown to the void.

Part of Zac had even considered picking up his sister and make a run for it, but he knew he would only be harming himself if he did that. There were just so many barriers in the way as they crossed the islands, anything from walls they needed to punch through to gates that needed to be hacked.

There were even thousands of battlebots that still roamed the inner islands like the whole base hadn't gone up in smokes, immediately attacking upon spotting his people. If Zac had left the others behind he would long have run out of energy by this point from the constant expenditure. That by itself was suicide since there was a hostile force waiting at the foot of the mountain.

The only lucky break, if you could call it that, was that they had only been attacked by one more Void Beast as they ran, and this one was roughly at the same level as the caterpillar from before. They had completely overwhelmed it with a furious assault before they set out again. There were a few times that a claw or an appendage appeared out of nowhere to snatch a few people though, but there wasn't much Zac could do about it.

It looked like the smarter Void Beasts were content with staying outside the islands, with the dumber ones falling through the protective film. After all, the whole Mystic Realm was crumbling. The Void Beasts only needed to wait for the last islands to crumble and gobble up everyone who was launched into the darkness.

Zac couldn't help but wonder about the fate of the True Sky Faction and the New World Government. The first islands that collapsed should have been roughly in the area where those factions resided. If the New World Government were still stuck at the outer sectors of the base they were definitely dead by now unless the spatial tunnels back to Earth still worked even in this environment.

It was a big blow to Earth to lose that many elites, but Zac didn't have the luxury of worrying about others. He had kept running ahead with rotating elite squads to pave the way ever since the weakness from using [Hatchetman's Rage]. They cleared the corridors of automated sentries, laser traps, bugging walls, and all kinds of dangers.

These forays allowed the weaker of his followers to just focusing on keeping up, and the army usually caught up within minutes of Zac's elite units setting out. But Zac knew the truth. Every time the bulk of the army caught up, there were a few people missing. This had turned into a true death march, and some people simply dropped down on the ground with their reserves completely drained.

Zac knew it, the soldiers knew it, but no one spoke about the fallen people that formed a trail of suffering across the past five or so platforms. They could only look ahead, praying that they would be able to cross the final hurdle before it was too late. Zac was in full panic-mode by this point. It had been over an hour since the last set of islands collapsed.

It felt like the floor beneath his feet could collapse at any moment as he was launched into the void. This was the innermost section of the research base, and he had spotted multiple places that seemed to hold treasures, but he didn't even consider looking into it. Any leftover energy he had was used to clear any hurdles in front of them instead.

The others were of the same sentiment, and four Anointed next to him didn't need any prompt to slam into the Memorysteel wall in front of them with almost suicidal fervor. The whole area shook as they unleashed a frantic barrage, turning the wall into scraps in just seconds. Zac unhesitatingly rushed straight through, and his eyes lit up at what waited on the other side.

There were no more corridors, just twisted memorysteel of a broken base that had formed a sharp and uneven square at the edge of the island. On the other side was a thirty-meter wide wire that led to their goal; the 'Taboo Mountain'. As long as they ran up that bridge they would be safe, or at least not in immediate peril.

However, reality often didn't live up to one's hopes and dreams, and Zac's eyes widened in horror when he saw the bridge leading to salvation start to crumble just as they made it.

A wave of flames rolled down along the collapsing rubble, and his heart beat like a drum out of fear when he realized that those runic flames were even eating the protective film. The cultists weren't just blowing up the path itself, they even targeted the protections that kept the islands safe. No wonder the other islands crumbled so quickly.

"Break the bridge!" Zac roared as he flashed forward.

There was nothing else he could do. They had already missed their chance of crossing as part of the bridge had already been swallowed by the Void. The only thing they could do now was to cut off the rest before those flames reached them. The island they stood on was still connected to the mountain through neighboring islands, which would hopefully keep it from collapsing.

The anointed quickly caught up and assisted him, and a series of desperate attacks hammered down on the Memorysteel wire as the wall of flames crept closer. But the bridge finally broke off, allowing Zac's group to breathe out in relief. The flames were all swallowed by the void just like the bridge itself, and the island didn't immediately fall apart like they had seen before.

The advance squad breathed out in relief, but they all knew that this only amounted to a stay of execution. They had lost their access to the mountain. Without the energy provided from the Taboo Mountain, the barrier would quickly start to weaken even without the interference of the Church of Everlasting Dao.

Running toward the next bridge was hopeless as well. The next bridge was a full two islands over, and they had to pass through complex memorysteel corridors while the cultists could run right over.

Besides, they were approaching the section of the previous Wasteland. A lot of those islands were fragmented or extremely small, and quite a few had already crumbled even without any outside interference. The protective film was clearly a lot weaker there compared to the rest of the islands, and going there was tantamount to suicide.

Zac's eyes turned to the army standing on the edge of the mountain, a towering fury burning in his chest. They were sneering and laughing at him like they were watching a great show as the protective film was slowly dissipating on their island. They might not be able to attack Zac or his people, but they clearly didn't feel that they needed to.

"What do we do, Warmaster?" Rhubat frowned. "Can we build a new bridge?"

"No," Zac sighed.

"We can!" Kenzie interjected as she came running, accompanied by Joanna and a group of Valkyries. "I think this thing will work!"

Zac felt the flame of hope reigniting in his chest when he saw what she was holding; the Spatial Drill. His eyes turned to the short stretch of darkness separating their island and the Memorysteel mountain. It was less than a hundred meters. Was this the true purpose of why the System wanted him to go back? He needed the Spatial Drill to save his people at this very juncture.

"What is that?" Joanna asked as she curiously looked at the weird Technocrat Tool.

"A Spatial Drill. It can create some sort of tunnels in space. It was this thing the Cartava Clan planned to use to escape this Mystic Realm," Zac explained as he turned to his sister. "How long do you need?"

"Just a few minutes," she said. "It's good to go, but it needs to dig a path through the Void."

"A few minutes," Zac muttered as he looked up at the weakening barriers. "Do it."

Kenzie nodded and walked over to the very edge of the island before she started tapping away at her console. The Anointed had heard their conversation and they formed a protective circle around her to let her work unabated.

More and more of his people streamed into the broken square, but they stopped in their tracks when they saw the vast chasm between the island and the mountain. A few of them simply slumped down on

the ground with eyes devoid of hope, while others looked to Zac for salvation. They hadn't heard the conversation between him and his sister, but they could clearly understand the severity of the situation.

"Don't give up! We will open a spatial tunnel to the other side," Zac roared as she looked at the exhausted army. "I know you are tired, but there is a hostile army on the other side. We'll need to take them out if we want to live. I'll lead the charge, but I can't do it alone. I need the assistance of all of you. Prepare yourselves."

Thousands of faces lit up when they heard they still had a shot at survival, and the whole square lit up as people frantically started absorbing energy from Nexus Crystals. They all knew who was waiting on the foot of the mountain. Many had even fought against the crazed cultists before. They knew they were in for a tough fight, and every extra morsel of Cosmic Energy might be the difference between life and death.

"Everyone, eat a Springroot provided by our people, right now," Joanna added from the side. "Anyone who hasn't eaten one in one minute will be executed. If you see someone faking or exchanging it, immediately report it."

The Valkyries reacted instantly, each of them taking out a Large bag of Springroot as they walked through the ranks. Everyone quickly ate the root without hesitation, more than used to this procedure. A commotion erupted as a Zhix suddenly tried to break off, but the warrior was cut down by his brethren before he could even take a step.

A similar scenario happened a moment later, when a human cultivator stealthily tried to swap out the provided root with something he had hidden in his sleeve. The moment he was exposed he tried to flee, only to get crushed by a close-by Anointed.

Zac had no idea when those two shapeshifters had snuck into his ranks, but he guessed it was sometime during the dash toward the end. Everyone had already been forced to eat a Springroot the moment they set out toward the first bridge, at which point a few cultists had been exposed as well according to his sister.

There had been no time to continuously test everyone as they ran for their lives though. Which had allowed a few of them to blend in with the others.

Seeing that everything was dealt with Zac sat down the next moment, gripping a D-Grade Nexus Crystal in each hand as a storm of Cosmic Energy entered his body. There was only so much he could replenish in a scant few minutes, and he estimated he was only 40% full by the time that Kenzie shouted.

Zac opened his eyes and saw a large vortex at the edge of the platform, seemingly fused to the exceedingly thin defensive film. The Spatial Drill was hovering in the air in front of it, constantly releasing a powerful beam into the hole. Kenzie had also pushed two odd spears into the ground on the sides of the vortex, and Zac guessed they were there to maintain the tunnel as soon as it was finished.

"What's going to happen next?" Zac asked as he walked over with [Verun's Bite] in his hands.

"The drill should reach the other side in a minute or so," Kenzie said. "At that time, space will be directly connected between our two sides. You can't let the cultists blow up the gate though. The drill is running on some weird spatial energy, and it only has fuel for this one attempt."

"I'll deal with it," Zac nodded as his eyes turned to the cultists waiting on the other side.

They had clearly figured out that his people were up to something, and they were making preparations of their own. Zac's tightened his grip as he took a deep breath. He was exhausted but he could only forcibly rouse his body to meet the challenge.

It was time to exterminate these lunatics once and for all.