

The Fall 641

Chapter 641: From the Void

Zac still hadn't recovered to his perfect state, but there was no helping it. There was a sense of foreboding in his heart as he saw the thick film slowly bulge inward, and he quickly put his free points into Dexterity before he closed his status screen. Only then did he jump down from the Anointed's shoulder and ran over to the leaders who all stood gazing toward the sky.

His inadvertent actions before had weakened the spatial barriers in this area, but they were still quite thick compared to the ones on the islands. Any Void Creature that managed to force its way through a barrier this powerful was probably stronger than the two they had fought off until now, most likely even a proper D-Grade being.

That wasn't something they could handle even if the beast was suppressed by space. His eyes quickly scanned his people, trying to figure out what they could do. Killing such a beast was impossible, but he might be able to lure it in the opposite direction long enough until it was finally killed off by the hostile environment.

"Have people rush toward the lowest layer, then move away from this place," Zac slowly said.

"Wait, something is wrong," Kenzie said as she looked down at her terminal. "I'm picking up Technocrat signals."

"What?" Zac exclaimed. "Have the creators of this place returned?"

"Perhaps," Kenzie muttered, and Zac noticed a hint of excitement on her face.

Zac knew all-too-well what his sister was thinking of, but he didn't share the sentiment. Zac wasn't as thrilled at the prospect of meeting the family, especially not in a pressed situation like they found themselves in now. Their mother might solve the situation with a wave of her hands, but she might also just kill everyone before taking him and his sister away. Or it might be his mother's enemies.

However, both Zac and Kenzie soon realized that their guess was way off when the presumptive Technocrat vessels suddenly became visible as though they appeared out of thin air. There was no way that a peak Technocrat faction would be responsible for building the weird bulky ships that tried to push through the film in the sky.

There were three of them, and Zac and the others were actually able to see them even when they were still outside in the Void. All three of them looked different, like they had been soldered together by random components scavenged from the base. But the shields that surrounded the metal hulls looked extremely powerful, and even Zac wasn't confident in breaking through those layers. Then again, their main goal was no doubt to keep the Void at bay.

Unfortunately, it looked like one of the ships was at the end of its ropes. Its shields were extremely weak, like they had turned down its energy consumption to the bare minimum. Zac guessed that the vessel was running out of fuel, and they chose to focus what they had left on breaking through the film.

"What should we do?" Joanna asked as the other elites turned to Zac for a decision.

"Let's wait a bit," Zac slowly said. "I think this should be the True Sky Faction."

Kenzie nodded in agreement. It was the only thing that made sense. It looked like the native faction with the most Datamancers had managed to build some sort of vessels that could traverse the Void by putting together different pieces of technology from the base. That was the only way he could explain why the vessels looked so different, and it also explained why they appeared here.

They were no doubt the first victims to the zealots' scheme, but they had managed to find one final path to survival through these ships. There only being three of them meant that the Church of Everlasting Dao probably managed to kill tens of thousands of people through their schemes though.

"They're sitting ducks right now. I bet they're screwed if we break the shields holding off the Void. If we want to strike now's the best chance," Ogras muttered, and a few others nodded in agreement.

"The True Sky Faction is probably the faction that poses the least threat to us," Zac said with a shake of his head. "And those vessels shouldn't be able to hold more than 60 to 80 people each. Besides, they might even hold earthlings considering they had an alliance with the New World Government."

"All the more reason to blow them up," Ogras muttered, but he didn't press the issue further.

"Get ready for battle just in case," Zac said as he cracked his neck.

However, a sudden change made Zac's eyes widen in horror, and he quickly changed his orders as he roared at the top of his lungs. "EVERYONE BENEATH E-GRADE, RUN!"

What had changed his tune so quickly was the appearance of an all-too-familiar tentacle that quickly grabbed the vessel with the weakened shield just as it was about to break through to the barrier to the Memorysteel mountain. The shields protecting the vessel immediately started to flicker, and a moment of weakness was apparently all it took.

The second the barrier was down the vessel simply disappeared, like it was swallowed by the void.

"Aaah-" Billy exclaimed with wide eyes to the side, and Zac could only agree.

It was hard to say what looked more horrifying; the monstrous tentacle of the Collector or the fact that it somehow made the whole vessel suddenly wink out of existence.

The other two ships didn't have any obvious response apart from releasing even more energy as they tried to force the way through the film that was now pushed tens of meters toward the mountain. But Zac honestly didn't hold out much hope for them. As expected, both of them were soon grabbed by a tentacle each.

"What should we do? What that thing?!" Kenzie gasped with wide eyes from the side.

"It's the Collector," Zac sighed as he gazed at the situation above. "Get away from this place. I'll try to help them."

He didn't know whether the True Sky Faction were enemies or friends, but he knew that he couldn't leave them to the Collector with a clean conscience. The scene of the torsos stuck to its main body still haunted Zac's dreams, and he wouldn't wish a fate like that even upon his worst enemies.

Kenzie nodded and flickered away, following the stream of soldiers who desperately ran away from this area. Zac looked around and saw Thea in the distance, and he nodded at her before she set off as well.

The pressure at even the middle layers had caused her wounds to reopen, and rather than forcing it she had decided to stay at the lower layers to keep things organized.

That was a lucky break that put her out of harm's way. The protective film was the weakest close to the area where Zac rampaged, and the True Sky Faction had chosen to break through right in front of them. Perhaps it was even premeditated, in hopes of eliciting help from Zac and his army.

The tentacles emitted a shocking pressure, and hundreds of people had blood running down their noses just from being in its presence. The shields on the two vessels were luckily a lot stronger compared to the first one, and they held even though the eerie hands sewn onto the tentacles tried to claw their way through.

The ships eventually managed to push their noses through the defensive film though, and Zac was surprised to see that the thick shields only appeared in the void. He immediately realized that this was the opportunity they needed, and his response was immediate. Two black chains shot upward with extreme force, while another two dug into the hard Memorysteel beneath.

The durable fetters of [Love's Bond] dug themselves into the hull, and Zac immediately started to pull.

"Help me out," Zac grunted when he saw he wasn't doing much headway on his own, and Billy and the Zhix immediately started pulling on the ships.

It was a tough struggle even with all their combined power, but the ships slowly started to enter the atmosphere. The question was whether they would be fast enough, as the shields on the two remaining vessels were rapidly depleting because of the Collector's constant attacks. Even worse, a third tentacle suddenly appeared, punching straight through the barrier as it aimed toward Zac.

Had it recognized him?

Zac was unable to flee because he was connected to the chains, but he wasn't alone in facing the Collector this time. There were still a few hundred elites staying behind, and they together should be able to keep the arm busy. Zac knew he wouldn't be able to cut the tentacle with [Chop], but perhaps he could push it back a bit with the force of a barrage.

But he barely had time to activate the skill before five thick murderous fractal edges appeared in front of [Verun's Bite].

What the hell just happened? It was almost like the fractal edges had exploded into being, rather than him conjuring them by pushing Cosmic Energy into the skill fractal. This wasn't a matter of being 18% faster, this was a whole new tier of speed. It wouldn't even take a second to conjure a full set of fractal edges before, but now it was essentially instantaneous. And without him moving any Cosmic Energy at all, they had simply appeared.

Not only that, but the edges even emitted a mysterious ancient aura, though Zac could confirm they didn't seem to contain any more power compared to before. Now was not the time to ponder about this weird change though, and he immediately launched the set of fractal edges at the Collector.

His arm was a blur thanks to his ungodly pool of Dexterity, and it looked like the weird situation with his skill wasn't a one-time thing. The moment he finished the fifth swing another set of fractal edges simply appeared with a shudder, and Zac didn't even need to pause as he kept launching blade after blade.

It almost looked like a mental illusion as an endless series of blades caused a band in the sky until they slammed into the tentacle with tremendous force. Of course, the Collector's tentacle wasn't even wounded after Zac imbued the fractal edges with the Fragment of the Axe.

"It's indestructible, just keep it away!" Zac shouted as he kept attacking, and the air was immediately lit up with an endless number of attacks.

Some launched concussive attacks like Zac while others formed shields. Those who could do neither threw powerful talismans at the tentacle and together it turned the whole area chaotic. But the Collector was simply too powerful. It endured the endless series of attacks as it slowly made its way forward, only losing some of its attached hands in its struggle.

They thankfully managed to slow it down at least, and the skips were soon enough a few meters inside the protective hull, exposing thick doors to the inner space. Both the doors opened the moment they were inside the barrier, and a flood of refugees came tumbling down.

The tentacles trying to drag the vessels back into the Void reacted instantaneously, and one person after another were snatched up and dragged away. But over a hundred people of over ten different races managed to survive, and they all started to create some distance as they attacked the tentacles that tried to snatch them up.

Seeing that they had accomplished their goal there was no point to stay behind, and Zac dislodged his chains from the vessels the moment people stopped falling out of it. The ships were quickly pushed out by the spatial film, and they disappeared one by one.

"Retreat!" Zac shouted, and the army quickly started running north while pushing down toward the lower layers to increase their speed.

Zac himself shored up the rear, and he had essentially turned into a turret thanks to his newfound ability to conjure fractal blades instantaneously. [Chop] alone wasn't enough, and he had to flash forward to physically slam the tentacles away just as they were about to snatch up one of his people.

The Collector was smart though, and it immediately realized that he was the biggest hindrance to increasing its collection. All three tentacles suddenly gained a massive boost in speed as they shot forward, turning into three eldritch spears aimed straight at him.

Zac had expected something like this to happen though, and he had an idea.

The tentacles had enough speed to break through the sound barrier, but a massive fist suddenly appeared out of nowhere, snatching all three tentacles up in its grip. It was [Nature's Punishment], but the hand was a bit larger and darker than before. Just like his fractal blades, it had been somehow changed, and it now carried a hint of antiquity to it.

More importantly, summoning the hand had been instantaneous and without any Cosmic Energy infusion into the skill fractal, which was almost absurd for such a powerful skill. However, he felt a sense of hollowness the moment he activated the skill, and he thoughtfully looked down at the fractal as he ran away while the wooden hand kept the tentacles locked in a vise.

The wooden fist only managed to delay the tentacles two seconds before it was crushed, but that was enough to create a massive gap between himself and the breach. It looked like the Collector still wasn't

willing to go all-out, but it was clear that the beast was annoyed. The three tentacles slammed into the mountain a few times before they slithered back toward the void, causing huge chunks of Memorysteel to fly all over.

Zac breathed out in relief when he saw that they were safe, and he instead turned his gaze inward.

The short battle had allowed him to realize that he had severely underestimated his bloodline, and one piece of the puzzle after another came together in his mind. He had been too preoccupied with what he had lost, to the point that he hadn't properly bothered to understand what he had gained. In fact, now that the haze in his mind had lifted, he wasn't even sure that the increased thickness of his pathways was due to his bloodline.

It might rather simply be a natural result of pushing his Race to D-Grade. After all, the D-Grade was where you gained a massive pool of Cosmic Energy from your Cultivator's Core, and one's pathways needed to be able to endure those volumes. Or it might just be a secondary boost from awakening his bloodline.

But the real prize was clearly something else, something much greater hidden in the depths of his body.