

The Fall 651

Chapter 651: Overbearing Truth

"We might have an advantage, but there are a lot of variables at play. There's something odd going on with his place," Kenzie said, and there was hesitation on her face. "There are items meant to deal with spatial anomalies in the labs, and this isolation chamber has somehow followed into this world. It's like we're missing something."

Zac nodded in agreement. There were some things that they hadn't figured out yet. Why was an item like the Spatial Drill built inside a Bloodline Research Base? Why had the energies of the base merged with the spatial anomalies, to the point that they seamlessly entered and exited from the barriers?

"Is that computer bastard trying to take the treasure for itself?" Ogras ventured, echoing Zac's thoughts. "We can't compete with the base itself. Those weapons it uses..."

"I don't think it should have any desires like that," Zac said. "It's a machine, not a cultivator. The goals of the base Administrator should simply be to maintain operations and protect against threats. I don't see what would make it try to absorb the treasure. It's more likely that it realized how dangerous the item was, and tried to seal it up to protect the base."

In fact, Zac knew from his talk with Jaol back on the Technocrat ship that there were AI that had intellects advanced enough that they essentially could be considered living. However, these types of high-tiered AI still couldn't cultivate, and they were pretty rare since they needed extremely expensive components to work.

Also, these types of living AI were a lot like Tool Spirits, meaning they could degrade mentally.

There was no way that even a rich Technocrat family would put an AI like that in charge of routine maintenance on some Research Base. It was not only a huge waste of resources, but it might actually result in a worse outcome compared to using a normal AI that ran more like a computer. Just imagine, what if an AI who slowly went insane like Brazla took charge of this place?

Nothing they had seen indicated it was that kind of AI though. If it was, it wouldn't have been possible for the Tsarun Clan to gain access, and especially impossible for the native Datamancers to trick it. The AI would instantly have realized the research subjects were manipulating its programs and taken action.

"In either case, what do we do?" Ogras asked, and both he and the Anointed turned to Zac. "Our Illusion Array-Disks aren't perfect. We'll be spotted sooner or later if we just loiter around here."

Zac hesitated a few seconds as he looked down at the building. The enormous construction actually did have a few gates, but could they really just waltz into the place like this? He was a bit hesitant about asking his sister to use Jeeves here, in case it would cause a reaction. However, it also seemed extremely dangerous to sneak inside through the wriggling scars covering the dome's surface.

"How about we observe for a while, and if nothing changes just walk right in?" Zac eventually said, unable to come up with a better idea.

"That's your plan?" the demon said with a scrunched-up face.

“Do you have any better ideas?” Zac muttered. “We don’t know where the Dominators are, and we don’t know how long this place will last. We can lay a trap out here in hopes Adcarkas will appear, but if we do that we might miss our opportunity. If I was him, I would already have headed inside.”

“Agreed,” Rhubat nodded. “Adcarkas has nigh-perfect energy masking abilities and they are capable of teleportation. It is unlikely we would spot them in the mountains even if we stay outside. Besides, with our frames, we’re likely to be spotted before we spot them.”

“Fine,” Ogras said with a roll of his eyes, but Zac could hear him mutter ‘bunch of meatheads’ beneath his voice.

They didn’t immediately rush toward the containment dome though, but instead inched closer until they reached a spot with better vantage a few kilometers away. The group kept a lookout for any activity while they made their final preparations, but there was nothing at all happening.

Suddenly the runes on the building lit up with a blue shimmering radiance as it started emitting an extremely odd aura. It was like the whole dome was shifting out of reality, like it was both there and somewhere else. The odd phenomenon subsided after a minute though, but the nine towers lit up at that moment.

The very same tendrils they had seen from the other side of the mountain radiated out from their peaks, and a ball of condensed energy was quickly forming right above the dome. It only lasted for a second before it destabilized and exploded, and the group felt the ripple pass through them a second later.

“It’s like reverse lightning-rods,” Kenzie muttered. “Discharging excess energy into the surroundings.”

“At least it doesn’t seem to get dangerous even at close proximity,” Zac muttered. “Alright, this should be the best opportunity to head inside. We have a while before the next ripple hits, just in case.”

The Anointed nodded and the group immediately set out. There was no way to cover their approach, so they could only rely on speed and hope that no one was keeping watch. The group rushed toward the closest gate, keeping a wide berth of the kilometer-tall pillar that still radiated some left-over energies after the initial outburst.

There were thankfully no automated defenses in place, and Zac breathed out in relief when the large gate completely ignored them. There was a console on this structure as well and Zac and his sister walked over. He was obviously not there to deal with the security protocols, but rather to block any attack in case something went wrong.

Kenzie connected her tablet, but she stopped tapping on it after just a few seconds.

“Is something wrong?” Zac asked. “Isn’t your clearance enough?”

“This place is different,” Kenzie muttered, but Zac felt she almost looked a bit excited.

He looked on with confusion as she put her hand against the console. The door slid open a few seconds later, making Zac a bit confused about what was so exciting. It looked like any other time one used those consoles to open a gate.

“What’s going on?” Zac finally asked as he saw his sister look down at her hand with a small smile.

“Genetic lock,” Kenzie whispered. “Really strong one. I don’t think the Datamancers can hack their way through these restrictions. Apart from the two of us, the rest would have to enter through the cracks.”

Zac finally understood why his sister looked so happy. They had been in this realm for weeks now, and this was the first time found any tangible proof of their connection to their mother’s clan. He knew that his sister had hoped to find out more about their technocrat ancestors in this place, but they hadn’t found anything at all. This gate at least confirmed her bloodline.

Part of Zac wanted to reach out and touch the console as well just to make sure, but fear and doubt kept him back. There were some theories hidden in the back of his mind, theories he wasn’t ready to confront just yet. He didn’t want to do anything that might rock the status quo right now.

Instead, he just moved [Love’s Bond] to block his front as he advanced through the gate. The rest quickly followed in tow, their eyes darting back and forth in search of any threats. However, the insides were pretty austere, with no dangers in sight.

Zac had somewhat expected to enter a corridor similar to the ones in the research base, but it wasn’t anything like that. Instead, it looked like the outer wall was just the first of multiple shells, with the next one starting roughly a hundred meters further inside. The space they stood in was sectioned off though, with Memorysteel walls making it impossible to walk in a circle around the whole building.

“It really looks like a containment chamber,” Kenzie muttered as she looked around curiously. “Multiple layers to isolate the Dimensional Treasure inside.”

Zac nodded in agreement. It almost felt like one of those places built to contain nuclear waste back on old Earth.

“Are you sure this place isn’t dangerous?” Ogras muttered as he looked around. “It feels like we have stepped into a refinement cauldron. Some high-level emissions can kill weak punks like us without notice.”

“Look over there,” Zac said as he pointed to the left. “Those buildings shouldn’t be there if this place was dangerous, right?”

The thing he pointed toward was the only thing of note except the gate in the second layer wall. It was a series of buildings that looked extremely small compared to the kilometer-high ceiling, but they were actually large enough to house hundreds of people. The buildings stood against the wall a few hundred meters away from the gate.

“That doesn’t prove anything,” Ogras said with a shake of his head. “I doubt anyone has ever lived in there. This heretic computer might have built this place following some blueprint in its memory, just adding buildings for personnel without understanding why.”

“Well, it’s impossible to be certain, but I still think the ripples are beneficial if anything. At least I haven’t felt anything wrong with my body,” Zac said. “My danger sense has been completely quiet all this while as well.”

“Our constitutions have been improved as well,” Rhubat added. “I had already exceeded my limits some time ago, hurting my core, but now I feel fine. There is even some room for me to grow yet again.”

“Improving potential?” Ogras muttered with gleaming eyes as he looked up and down the Anointed.

“Let’s go check out the buildings first,” Zac decided. “We shouldn’t delay in case this place really is dangerous.”

The group flashed over, but they didn’t find anything after even after a thorough search. Ogras was right about one thing; no one had ever lived in this place, further proving that the Tsarun Clan never reached the core of the Research Base.

Some of the rooms looked like some Science Fiction pre-fab solutions that still hadn’t been decorated. There were kitchens, recreational rooms, cultivation chambers, and living quarters along with some sparse metal furnishings. One room housed what looked like a command center, but the computers were empty of data and they weren’t even connected to anything.

“I think this place was built in case the creator of this Research base ever returned,” Ogras eventually said as he gave Zac a pointed look.

“No point in lingering here,” Zac said. “Let’s head for the core.”

The others agreed, and they walked over to the next gate. This one was also made from the bluish Memorysteel, but there also seemed to be something else added to it. There were also thin streaks of some golden metal covering its surface, and Zac guessed it was some higher version alloy compared to Memorysteel.

Kenzie had no problems opening this gate either, and the hundred-ton gate soundlessly slid open after she touched her hand against the console. The group walked through, and Zac almost felt like he had been caught in an illusion loop just like the corridor inside during the Eastern Trigram Hunt. The environment looked almost identical after they walked through the twenty-meter thick wall, with the exception that there were no buildings inside this layer.

The group kept moving forward, passing one gate after another. Eventually, they reached the 9th layer, this one solely made from the golden metal they had seen more and more of inside the walls. By this point, they could feel extremely powerful emissions on the other side, and it almost felt like a god was trapped inside.

It wasn’t just a matter of intensity, but also quality. It felt like the fluctuations hinted at something vast, something far beyond their understanding. It was just like when Zac had witnessed the corner of the chaos pattern. It gave the impression that the very air around him held the answers to all his questions about his cultivation, but the information was too esoteric for Zac to gain anything at all.

Zac was pretty confident this was the last layer judging by the quality of materials and the power of the emanations. The layer was a lot smaller by now as well. The insides couldn’t be more than five hundred meters high, and thrice that across; a tenth the size of the outermost dome.

There was also another set of buildings next to the gate, but they actually couldn’t get inside according to Kenzie. There were a huge number of security protocols guarding it, and not even their genetic code could help them get inside. Zac didn’t want his sister to use Jeeves to force its way inside at this juncture, so they instead turned to the final gate, which thankfully didn’t have the same sort of defenses.

"Here I go," Kenzie said as she placed her hand against the console.

This time it took almost a minute, but the doors eventually slid open, which instantly increased those mysterious fluctuations by multiple orders of magnitude.

It still didn't feel dangerous or detrimental, except for the mental pressure that stemmed from the energy. It almost made Zac question everything he had learned about cultivation and the Dao so far, like he was just a child making stuff up while playing in the mud. The energy around him was the real truth, and if he didn't give up on his wayward ways he'd never reach the peak of cultivation.

Zac quickly activated [Soul Guardian], the sixth and final skill he'd learned in the Dao Repository. A small golden avatar appeared above the soul in his mind as an inscrutable pattern appeared on his forehead. The skill had taken the spot of [Mental Fortress] and acted as a dummy to take on all kinds of mental attacks, but even his E-grade mental defense skill couldn't provide any protection against something like this.

However, he quickly stabilized his mind, discarding those poisonous thoughts. He knew his path wasn't a lie, but it was simply a matter of grade. The concepts hidden in the air around them were clearly far beyond anything he or anyone else in the group could fathom, but so what? They were not of his path, and his own insights would be able to match these by the time he reached C-Grade as well.

That conviction gave him a sense of tranquility that he hadn't really felt since entering the odd isolation building, and it felt like it had somehow solidified his own path even further.

It looked like Kenzie had quickly adapted as well, and the Anointed were extremely stoic. Zac had to give it to them. Their power wasn't a match to his own, but their mental fortitude and conviction were extremely strong. They had the makings of powerful cultivators, provided Ibtep's mission was a success.

Billy looked fine as well, seemingly even enjoying the atmosphere. The one who had the worst of it was clearly Ogras, and his face kept undergoing rapid and erratic changes. One second he looked ecstatic, only to be plunged to the depths of despair the next moment. Sweat was pouring down his face, and his hands twitched. Zac frowned at the scene, but his sister was quicker as she walked over to him.

"Hey," she said with a soft voice as she placed a hand on his chest. "Don't think too much."

It seemed to work, as his facial expressions gradually calmed down. He exhaled a deep breath he had been holding in before he nodded at Kenzie with gratitude in his eyes. Only then did Zac relax and turn toward the mysterious object in the center of the room.

The Dimensional Seed.