

## The Fall 360

### Chapter 360: Dangers of Technology

Both Ilvere and Janos sported a new collection of scars, but it looked like both of them would be fine after some rest.

"Not quick enough to prevent Alea from being wounded," Zac sighed after hearing what Ilvere said.

"That lass is strong, I believe she will be able to overcome this," Ilvere said as he thumped down on the ground in front of Zac and Ogras.

Zac only nodded, though he knew that the situation, unfortunately, wasn't that easy. Being strong-willed wasn't enough to survive a fractured soul.

"Just what happened here?" Zac asked.

Ilvere grimaced as he recounted what the group had encountered since the teleporters went dark. Zac frowned when he heard how arduous their past days had been, and pangs of guilt once again rose in his heart. He knew that he couldn't be responsible for all ills of the world, but he still felt that he was somehow to blame.

"I guess we're lucky we weren't deemed important enough for one of the true generals to act," Ilvere said with a depreciating smile. "Otherwise we would never have made it this far. They have a lot of strong guys in their ranks."

"It's still amazing you managed to hold on this long," Zac said with genuine appreciation.

"The lass was a large factor in our survival, as was the barkeep," Ilvere said.

"The Barkeep? Ryan?" Zac asked with confusion.

"That boy is a real hero."

Zac blankly looked at Ilvere for a few seconds, having great trouble reconciling the young man who had been hiding out in his apartment with the epithet 'Hero'. Did the Barkeep class possess some hidden and amazing attacks against the undead? Or did it allow him to become the fabled drunken fist?

"We have been constantly fighting without stopping for over a week. Some people we had to carry for a while since they were truly out of energy, but we normally would have no way of marching for 9 days without sleep. Luckily his brews helped us stay conscious up till now. Of course, many will be in a weak state for a while," Ilvere explained.

"That's okay," Zac nodded. "We should be fine unless the Lich King himself comes knocking."

The two demon generals soon excused themselves though, as they desperately needed to sleep as well. They were amongst those who hadn't slept a wink for the whole duration, and they had always stayed in the frontlines to keep their people safe. Zac and Ogras didn't speak much either, instead opting to recuperate in case another wave of attackers arrived.

Thankfully they were completely unaccosted, and the army set out without trouble 8 hours later. A lot of people were sporting various degrees of wounds and traces of exertion on their faces, but they no

longer seemed like zombies themselves. Between the healing pills Zac brought and proper rest they were in far better shape compared to before.

The army kept the highest pace they could through the wildlands, but there was no way such a large group could move as quickly as Zac was able to proceed on his own. So he spent his time going back and forth around the army, killing anything that might prove a threat to them. They had already lost so much, so he didn't want to lose a single man on the final stretch of their return.

Thankfully it quickly became clear that the Undead had given up on taking out his army, as Zac couldn't even find the shadows of a single elite undead in the vicinity. There were still a few zombies and quite a few beasts, but nothing that indicated an army in the area.

Zac could only guess that some of the ghost scouts had seen the final battle, and the generals felt the price was too high to keep targeting them. Besides, the death march over the past 10 days had created quite some distance between themselves and the three main hordes.

Since there was no immediate threat he could relax somewhat, and he took the chance to figure out various things. His first idea to save time was to find a town, or at least the ruins of one, to see if he could gain control of it to buy a teleportation array.

Unfortunately there was no response after finding three abandoned towns, and he wasn't able to find a populated one either. This whole area seemed to be made from former tundra, either from eastern Russia or Mongolia, and there were barely any people in these regions even before the integration. Now with strong beasts walking the plains it was no surprise that the few places of civilization he found were long deserted.

After a day's travel it started to become increasingly clear that they might just have to walk the whole way back, but that didn't mean that they couldn't utilize their time efficiently. So Zac took his sister some distance away from the army, and after looking around placed down a few array disks to isolate themselves from prying eyes.

"What's going on?" Kenzie asked with interest when she saw how careful Zac was.

"Here," Zac said as he took out a few of the Technocrat items. "Are these of any benefit to Jeeves?"

He had taken out one of the scout drones and one of the laser weapons that had been attached to a battle droid. Kenzie gingerly picked up the two items and curiously looked at them. Zac was about to explain what they were when a red light shot out of Kenzie's eye and quickly enveloped the two items.

"Wha-" Zac exclaimed as he took a step back.

"Pretty cool, right?" Kenzie said with a wide smile.

"You looked like a cyborg just now," Zac said with a stern face. "What's going on?"

"Well, you told me to avoid showing off my skills yesterday, right?" Kenzie said with a shrug. "So we have been trying to figure out ways to make Jeeves abilities to look more like normal skills."

His sister was referring to the fact that he warned her of relying on her AI too much. Her performance against the left-over zombies had been a bit too eye-catching, and people had started to talk. Luckily his own power was enough to justify Kenzie's skills for most people, as they assumed he had given her

various treasures and help. But he still didn't want to take any risks where the secret about Jeeves would leak.

Using a beam that shot out of her eye to scan items felt pretty damn far away from the goal of staying incognito, so he didn't understand what she meant. She had looked like a robot when the red light exited her pupil. But Zac realized on second thought that he had actually sensed a bit of Cosmic Energy in the ray, something that never was the case with technology.

But Zac didn't have time to ask how she made that happen, as the drone suddenly started to hover above Kenzie's hand.

"Wow, so cool," Kenzie said as the small drone made a few turns around her.

"Is it you controlling it?" Zac asked.

"Yeah, or well, it's Jeeves who controls it," Kenzie said. "Do you have more of these?"

"Yeah, a whole lot of them. What are you pla-" Zac said, but his voice got stuck in his throat.

The drone started to disintegrate, turning into lights as they entered Kenzie's forehead. In just a second it was completely gone, not even leaving a speck of dust behind.

"Jeeves ate it," Kenzie explained, though the comment felt a bit superfluous. "It seems he gets smarter the more types of technology he eats. Do you have more stuff?"

"I do, but this doesn't feel safe," Zac asked with some hesitation.

Jeeves was probably stolen technology from Firmament's Edge, and feeding it to make it stronger came with very real risks. It was not like Jeeves followed the Three Laws of Robotics. The AI might turn against Kenzie when it was strong enough, killing her before returning to its creators.

"I know what you are thinking, but I think we are bound for life," Kenzie said after some hesitation. "We are fused in a way, my soul gives it life. If I die Jeeves will cease to exist. But perhaps the only way to know how he works for sure is finding mom."

Zac slowly nodded, but he couldn't help but have a bad feeling in his heart. He could only hope there would be some answers inside the Mystic Realm since there was no way that place had no connection to Leandra. He handed over part of the things he looted from the Technocrat Incursion for Kenzie to go through in the end. He also made sure that she wouldn't absorb things that might be crucial in operating the large forges or the mechas.

Unfortunately it seemed that he had made a mistake in not looting the corpses of the Technocrat Incursion. According to Kenzie's preliminary findings it seemed that a lot of the technology relied on subneural chips to act as interfaces between the Technocrat's brains and the drones and such.

Kenzie would still be able to control the items with the help of Jeeves, but it would be difficult for others to handle Technocrat technology in the short run. Perhaps they could refit some things to be controlled by normal computers instead, as implanting chipsets into one's brain seemed like the kind of modifications the System frowned upon.

After handing over the Technocrat items to his sister he resumed his vigil around the army. Ogras sometimes joined him, and they mostly discussed their next step after dropping off the army at a usable Teleportation Array.

“What do you think, can I take him down?” Zac asked during one of their discussions.

“Hm... It would help if we could fight his top general,” Ogras mused, understanding that Zac was referring to the Lich King. “Seeing his strength would give us a hint of the power of the Lich himself. But truthfully...”

“What?” Zac probed as the demon trailed off.

“You have accumulated far more power than is the norm for an F-Grade, and taking down most Incursions will be easy,” Ogras said. “But the Undead Empire is endlessly vast, and we don’t know their means. You will not only be fighting a true undead elite, but also his army and defensive arrays. There is no way he’ll leave the safety of his base as things stand. They can just wait it out until they kill this planet.”

“So you think I need to evolve first?” Zac sighed.

“Well, at least go to the tower and get that title. We might also find other useful items there that will help us,” Ogras said, once again bringing up the Tower of Eternity.

“The tower?” Zac frowned. “There is no time for that. Honestly, I’m thinking of skipping going altogether and instead push for as quick an evolution as possible.”

“What? No!” Ogras shouted. “Don’t be crazy! Remember, getting the title is not the only reason we’re going. You’re supposed to find a patron force as well, in case The Great Redeemer finds his way here.”

“The terraforming might be completed any day now. I can’t gallivant off-planet for weeks while our planet is collapsing!”

“Visiting the tower does not take that long,” the demon said with a roll of his eyes.

“How long does it take then?” Zac asked with confusion.

He had already heard that there were 81 known floors, and Ogras had once divulged that he was stuck on a floor for a month before passing it.

“Between one day and a year,” Ogras said.

“A YEAR?!” Zac shouted. “There’s no way we have time for that!”

“Just listen,” Ogras said with a roll of his eyes. “The tower itself only takes one day at the most. But you are not transported directly to the Tower.”

“What?” Zac asked with confusion.

Zac hadn’t really delved into the subject of the Tower of Eternity before, as he had expected Ogras would go over it before they set out. But it seemed it was time to get a better picture of how that place worked.

“You get teleported to the Base Town. Or at least the Base Town of your sector,” Ogras said. “It is a huge town that extends around the tower itself. After using the token you will be able to stay a year at the longest, though you can leave early. The tower itself takes up to 99 days, but it is in a special space, so only one day will pass in real time.”

“So we could be back just one day after activating the tokens?” Zac asked with intrigue.

“Yes, but we should stay longer if time allows it. Entering the tower itself can only count as half the benefit of that place.”