

Loot

I opened the chest, then blinked at what was inside of it. For a moment I thought that someone was playing a joke on me. There were four items inside. The one that caught my eye immediately was the biggest one. Placed sideways from corner to corner was a weapon, one that I recognized. It was a glaive, with elaborate decorations near each of the blades, and a long wood and metal handle. Why exactly it was a glaive, was interesting. I looked up at the sky, wondering if I was being watched. It was too much of a coincidence for it to be a glaive.

I reached down and pulled it out. It was a bit under two meters long, and heavy though not overly so. It looked like it was a real deal. The blades were sharp, but something caught my eyes, imprinted on the metal decoration on the back of the blade. I frowned at the text which just brought more questions. Then then other things caught my attention. Like the screws on the handle. I put that aside and laid the weapon on the ground, then reached for the second item.

This one was a dagger in a leather sheath. The handle was wrapped in colorful blue and purple thread, and the pommel had a bird's head sculpture on it. There was no guard, and as I drew the blade from its sheath, I saw that it didn't share many similarities with daggers I was familiar from Earth. This one had some decorations on the blade, and it was a straight blade with barbs near the bottom of the blade. I returned it to its sheath and then tied it to my belt.

The next items were two cloth bags, pouches really. I took one in hand and heard it clink. I frowned, then opened it and immediately dropped it while hissing. It was silver, or at least it looked like it. I grabbed the pouch again and looked closer. It looked like it was about a dozen silver coins. I

reached for one and hissed as it burned me. Well, there goes the idea that maybe I didn't need to worry about silver again. Once I had realized that I could walk around in the sun here, I had the idea that perhaps the other weakness of the vampires might be lessened too. My neck wound should've clued me in to otherwise.

I closed the pouch and put it aside for the moment, then picked up the other one. I opened it carefully and looked inside. It was filled with about half a dozen gemstones. As soon as I looked at them, I felt a pull from my chest, the place where I had felt the pressure of my Mask. Immediately, I closed the pouch. I was done with touching things that gave me strange sensations like that. Not until I had a safe place to experiment.

I gathered all the items along with my old weapons then started for the rock before pausing as I remembered something. I narrowed my eyes at her. "Are you smaller than you used to be?"

"Feedback: Affirmative. The target's attack destroyed approximately 10% of this Unit's Structural Mass. Harvesting additional biomass is required for recovering lost mass."

Well, that meant that she could get destroyed, or at least the drone platform could.

"Do you want to, uh, consume the corpse?" I asked.

"Feedback: Affirmative."

"Well, go for it then," I said and watched as the dragon flowed over to the animal many times its size and started consuming. It was eerie to watch really, I could see the body of the animal collapsing and heard wet sounds that resembled something eating. It made me shiver. Like with the monkeys, I saw the black vapor leaving through Saia's surface. What she had previously described as waste.

It took her maybe an hour to go through all of it, all the while I watched patiently in fascination as the big corpse was disappeared by the relatively small puddle of goo. There was a lot more black vapor floating above than there was with the monkeys though.

Once she was done, the puddle reformed into the dragon, now visibly larger, but still not much larger than she was before the fight. The conversion rate seemed to really suck, but then again I didn't know anything about what the Ke Erzi faced. Nor, as she had said, was I able to sustain her being larger.

“Let's go,” Saia flowed to my wrist, herself into a bracelet, a wrist guard really. With a shake of my head I started climbing the rock. I approached the rift slowly. Then, I took a deep breath and stepped through. The world twisted, in the same way as it had when I arrived in this place. Light flashed before my face and then my feet touched solid ground. I blinked as my sight came back.

I was back in the buried ruin. I looked around and saw no signs of the rift or any threats that I could see. Though I immediately felt the sun. It was close to dawn. I had spent nearly the entire night in that place. I wanted to explore, but I didn't want to do it during the day when I was at my weakest, so I settled in to wait in the big room. While the dawn approached I looked over my new weapons, then spoke to Saia who had transformed into a dragon and was looking around.

“How are you doing Saia? You got hit pretty bad there.”

“Feedback: This unit's operational capacity is not altered.”

“Good, good,” I said slowly. Somehow, having someone to talk to and experience all of this with made it a lot easier. “So damage to you doesn't impact you that much, huh? Is there anything that can hurt you.”

“Clarification: Damage to the Autonomous Platform does not correlate damage to the unit itself. This unit’s location is inside the Host body, critical damage to this Unit can only occur if the Host is critically damaged as well.”

“Oh,” that did make sense, she had mentioned that she bonded with my brain and nervous system. It slipped my mind. “So that form of yours is like a drone that you are operating remotely?”

“Feedback: That is correct.”

“So, is anything here familiar? Do you think that your people built this place?”

Saia approached a wall then licked it, or rather pushed a tendril like tongue deep into the wall. Once she was done and retracted her tongue, she stood still for a few seconds, and then spoke. “Feedback: Negative, structural composition of this material doesn’t match anything on Erzi. It is unlikely that this place was built by the Ke Erzi.”

“Couldn’t they have changed the way they did things in the time you were abandoned?”

“Clarification: This place predates the Erzi, the current estimate is that this wall is roughly 40,000 years old. Erzi culture is roughly 35,000 years old, and nothing in this Unit’s records indicates that they were capable of building a wall like this one in their pre-history.”

I blinked, that seemed like a long time. “Are you sure?”

“Feedback: Affirmative. This wall’s molecular makeup is superior to what the Erzi have accomplished. This Unit can detect a Source Weave Engram of unknown origin woven within the wall, though it is no longer active.”

“There is magic in the wall?” I asked.

“Clarification: A Source Weave Engram is a matrix that activates an effect that you would consider *magic*.”

“Like a spell circle then, I guess,” maybe I should stop trying to use things from Earth to make sense of what was happening here. It obviously didn’t translate perfectly. “I think that it is time for me to tell you everything that I know, maybe you could help me make sense of it all.”

I told Saia that I was from Earth, and how I got here. My experiences here and everything I knew about Masks. Once I was finished, I looked at the dragon and spoke.

“So, what are the chances that we are on your people’s world?”

“Feedback: Chances slim to none. Most probable explanation is that the same event that brought you here is what has taken this Unit from its world. The rules of the Source Weave seem to be different, explaining why some of my Source Weave Engrams are nonoperational even while they are whole.”

“Which ones don’t work?” I asked.

“Feedback: [Communication Array Matrix], [Area Sensor Matrix], I have repaired the [Plasma Shot] Engram as well, seeing as combat operations appear to be a priority. It is unresponsive.”

I gulped, [Plasma Shot], yeah that would’ve come in handy.

“Any ideas as to why it doesn’t work as it is supposed to?” I asked her.

“Feedback: Unknown.”

I sighed, of course I couldn't have answers. "Okay then, I guess that we need to find a way to survive together, there isn't much more that we can do without figuring out where we are and what the rules are. Is there anything that you want to do though? We are kinda stuck together."

"Feedback: Survival of the Host is the highest priority for this Unit. Recovery of any information regarding the fate of the Creators would be welcome."

I nodded. "Okay then. Now, if we are going to survive I need to know exactly what you can do. You changed shape before, how many different shapes can you take?"

"Feedback: The Autonomous Platform can take any shape imaginable, only limitation is the amount of structural mass and available power."

That could be very useful. "Could you take shape of a weapon for me?" I reached over to the knife I got from the chest and offered it to her. She walked over, looked at the weapon for a bit, then collapsed into goo. A big chunk of it shifted into the shape of the knife while the rest moved over me to my hand and formed a very thin bracelet.

I picked up the Saia knife and looked it over. It had the same hexagonal shapes all over its surface, but other than that it was a perfect replica. "Do you need to see something in order to take its shape?" I asked.

"Feedback: Negative, only proper understanding of the shape is required."

"So if I described something to you, you could probably turn into it?"

"Feedback: Possibly, this Unit's main use was always meant to be as armor and weapon system for a Ke Erzi Host."

I nodded. She wasn't large enough to become anything more than a knife, but maybe in the future, if she grew. I wondered if she would work as a gun, a revolver maybe? Though ammo would be an issue, unless she could make and shoot parts of herself as bullets. I glanced at the bracelet and the knife, she could obviously separate herself, or rather the drone. I pushed those thoughts into the back of my head, and had Saia switch back.

"Could you remember that shape?" I asked, lifting up the original knife. "It might be useful to have you assume it at times. I think that you are sharper and stronger than this one."

"Feedback: Affirmative."

With that I turned my attention to my gear, such as it was. I had a big glaive, which was heavy and sharp, but I saw things on it that were problematic. I wasn't sure if I wanted to try and use it in battle. Still, the knife seemed useful so I fastened it on my belt. The two claw improvised daggers I crossed behind my back through my belt. Then I came to the two small sacks, I put the one with the silver in my pouch. It didn't slip my notice that the silver was a currency, one that I hadn't seen before. It suggested that there was someone in this world, or at least some kind of guiding force for all of this.

I opened the second sack and dumped the contents in front of me. There were eight gemstones on the ground. They were in four different colors, two of each, and they seemed to be giving off a faint light.

"Statement: This unit can detect Source Weave within the objects," Saia chirped from my shoulder. "Though, this unit has no records of anything similar on Erzi."

Right, I leaned down to study them closer without touching. I felt them being drawn to my chest, and I didn't want to do anything yet.

“Any idea what they are?” I asked.

“Feedback: Negative.”

That made me think of something, I pulled out the silver pouch and showed it to Saia. “Do these look familiar? Anything from your records?”

“Feedback: Negative. No such currency had ever been used by Ke Erzi to the best of my knowledge.”

I grimaced and put the silver back on my waist. I returned my attention to the gemstones. Four colors, two of each, orange, light blue, brown, and light green.

Slowly, I reached for one of them, then after a moment of hesitation picked it up with my fingers. As I was picking it up, I noticed that the light of the gemstone in my fingers and one of the ones on the ground dimmed as it was raised away from the other gems. Saia noticed it too, and tilted her head. I brought it close to one of the other gemstones and nothing happened. I frowned then pressed it closer to the one that was of the same color, both started to glow faintly.

With a bit of shuffling them around, we discovered that they glowed when they were near the ones that were of the same color, and each also glowed when next to two other colors, but not the third. The orange one glowed next to the light green and brown ones, the light blue one next to brown and light green, the brown next to orange and light blue, and the light green one next to light blue and orange ones. They all glowed when next to those of the same color.

“Well, that is... interesting,” I said.

“Statement: The gemstones each seem to possess an innate nature of Source, one that has its opposites. The likelihood of the gemstones Source being elemental in nature is above 90%.”

I glanced at Saia. “Elemental?”

Saia pointed with her snout. “Feedback: Orange corresponds to fire, light green to air, brown to earth, light blue to water. It also fits within the currently known parameters, fire and water, and air and earth are opposing; no resonance. These are the most primitive applications of Source Weave affinities.”

“Huh,” I shook my head. I wondered what they did. “So, what do you think they do?”

“Feedback: Not enough information available to come to a conclusion.”

“Right, there we are in agreement,” I added.

“Query: This unit requests one of the items for assimilation.”

I blinked and glanced at the dragon. “You want to eat it?”

“Feedback: This unit wishes to understand more about the nature of Source-Weave on this world.”

That seemed like it could be useful for both of us. I let her pick one. She took one of the blue gemstones with her mouth, then swallowed it whole. I studied her closely as her eyes flashed with light for a few seconds, then returned to normal.

“Well?” I asked, when Saia remained quiet.

“Report: The Source Weave amount within the gemstone is minuscule, I have added it to my fuel reserves. The Source Weave Engram within it is complex beyond anything that I have in my records. Beyond anything that my analysis modules can comprehend. This Unit apologizes, it has wasted resources.”

“It is not wasted,” I said. “We are learning about these gemstones. Let me try something.”

I took one in my hands and brought it close to my chest. I felt the pressure inside react, but nothing happened. I tried to will the gemstone inside, thinking that maybe it was a skill or something like that, but there was no reaction. I frowned, then looked at Saia.

“I guess that doesn’t work either,” I said.

Then I felt something wash over me and looked up. The dawn had arrived.