

The table was silent, all of us staring at the floating blue crystal projection. For me, it was because I was trying to figure out what she meant since we had already established that the system had failed too early to form dungeons. A quick glance around showed that my guests, as well as George and Alissa, had absolutely no idea what she was even talking about, missing even the basic context of what a dungeon would be. I turned to focus on Sally, wanting my own answers before I tried to explain what she was talking about.

"I thought you said there weren't any dungeons?" I asked, raising an eyebrow at her. "They were too complicated, and too much of the system structure was non-functional."

"Well, yes. The real, actual dungeons aren't working," She confirmed, bouncing to emphasize. "But there are still surface points of interest. They-"

"Wait, wait, hold on," Charles said, holding up. "Something tells me you aren't talking about medieval prison cells, so what are you talking about?"

"Dungeons as in explorable location," I explained. "Like in video games or D&D."

"Think of them as voluntary multi-floored arenas, where you face off against monsters, complete puzzles, and navigate traps," Sally explained. "Each floor is harder than the previous one, and everything follows strict rules. No randomness, no chaos, but still dangerous due to their utter mercilessness. If something goes wrong, you're probably dead."

"What? Why would anyone use them then?"

"Because it would make you stronger," I answered. "I explained the system was basically a way to unlock your potential, even surpass it? The dungeons would be one of the ways you would do that. You'd find useful things like weapons or armor, as well as gain experience and train your skill. Probably a good way to get resources as well. It would kind of like be a renewable source of what drives the system. It also doesn't really matter because they don't exist."

'Correct!' Sally confirmed. "I was just referring to the points of interest as dungeons because that's kind of what they are to us now."

"Points of interest... like the pool cave?" I asked. "We-"

Charles let out a long groan, and I couldn't help but chuckle. I spent a few minutes explaining what the high school gang had seen, admitting that I hadn't seen it myself and that no one had seen it in at least a week, maybe more. I also answered a few more questions about the system and dungeons. Once everyone was on the same page, or at least less confused, Sally continued.

"The system didn't have time to spawn dungeons since they are huge, complicated, partitioned sub-dimensions and one of the last things the system does. It did, however, have time to start the seeding process for points of interest," She explained. "There are several thousand, maybe more, in the state alone. Some repeat, some are unique, but all of them have challenges at some point, and at the end of those challenges should be something we can use to improve the bastion, an upgrade crystal."

"What? Like sources of the energy you use to form rewards?" I asked, my eyes wide in surprise.

"Oh, no, nothing that potent!" She responded, bobbing side to side. "That energy is literally reworking reality around us. These little blue crystals are just a system reward for exploring a POI first. You could use a blue crystal to upgrade a weapon, skill, stats, vehicle, or anything. But with the system structure so broken up, they are practically useless."

"So... how will they help us?"

"Well...When I set the boundaries of the bastion, I tapped into the already land claim function of the system, something I didn't realize until I started examining the structures," She explained. "It's barely intact, with very little functionality. But... I should be able to use the upgrade crystal to expand the bastion's structure. I don't know how much one crystal will do, but since the population has dipped far below the intended value, I would imagine most POI are unexplored."

"They are first come, first serve?" I asked, surprised.

"Yes, as far as I can tell, at least," Sally confirmed. "You have to understand that studying the system structure is like trying to read a map that has been torn to shreds and scrunched up into a ball. It's a miracle I've been able to glean this much."

"So, if we want a crystal, we need to explore the pool cave," I said with a nod. "If we are lucky, that will let us improve the bastion."

"What about Mabel's farm?" Danny, the firefighter that Charles had brought, asked. "We went there hoping to get some food supplies, but it was... strange. Her orchard had changed, the trees looked twisted, and her plant patches were even worse. We didn't even make it into the grounds before some... ominous noises scared us off."

"That sounds very much like a POI as well," Sally agreed. "We can expect quite a few of the area and even more beyond that!"

"Maybe we should focus on one thing at a time?" George suggested, turning to focus on the fire chief. "Charles, moving your people here, even if we don't have a quick and easy way to

house them, will still be safer than the fire station. Even if they are sleeping on cots or in tents, it's *still* safer."

"I... I think you're right. This building would make getting surrounded by those... Dino-dogs a lot less dangerous," He admitted. "Sarah, do you think the civilians will accept coming here?"

"The living conditions aren't much different from what we had at the station," She pointed out. "I believe most, if not all, will be willing to come here. But, Aiden. You need to understand that as safe as you hope to make this castle, there is still a lot to be scared of. We have spent the last month suffering, watching our worlds come apart. Greif and fear is a dangerous combination, one you are inviting into your home."

"Are... you saying we shouldn't accept you?" I ask, more than a little confused.

"No. I am making sure that you understand what you are getting into," She explained. "I do not want to move here only for you and your people not to be able to handle the baggage we come with. Having to leave once we settle in again would be devastating."

For a long moment, I was silent, considering the woman's words. I didn't want her to think I wasn't taking this seriously by brushing off her worries.

"I will admit, this is happening before we were entirely ready," I finally responded. "I was hoping to get a few more jumps in, a few more rewards before we started going out and gathering people together. And I won't pretend to know that everything will be fine or that we won't have issues. What I do know is that we need to work together, and the bastion is the best place to do that. I will not turn people away, not when we can reasonably help. As long as your people try their best, we will as well."

"Thank you for your honesty," "She responded with a nod, before reaching across the table to shake my hand. "I hope we can work together amicably."

"I'm sure we will be able to work everything out," I said with a smile. When we both sat back in our chairs, I explained our next step. "So, we have some transport options, specifically three bikes and a golf cart. I want to ride those back, so that tomorrow we can ferry everything over, making a few trips to gather all the resources and anything useful you might have at the station."

Charles agreed, and after a short discussion, part of which was deciding who would stay behind at the bastion with Roger and the kids. Alissa volunteered first, explaining that she wanted to keep an eye on Amelia anyway. With that decided, we began to make our way out of the bastion. At this point, we had been at the bastion for almost three hours and had been gone from the station for four. With the bikes and golf cart, we would make it back to the station with time to spare, but not enough to make a trip back.

Before I could follow George the rest out, Sally froze up by the doorway, stopping mid-bounce. The fact that she was completely immobile, something she never really was, queued me in that something was up. I stepped closer and walked around her, looking slightly up at the frozen projection.

"Sally, what's wrong?" I asked, still looking up at her. "You alright?"

George, as well as all three of our guests, heard me and stopped just outside the door, turning back to look at us. I ignored them, focusing on my extra-reality partner.

"...Oh, yes. I just managed to find the next Jump pair," She explained, her usual movements restored after a long moment's pause. "Would you like to hear them?"

"Yeah, may as well," I said with a shrug. "We can't do it now, not when a failure would decrease the people capable of helping."

"And Jessica and Barry are still at the station," Roger added, to which I responded by pointing at him and nodding.

"What he said," I continued. "What are the options?"

"Well...the first takes place in Resident Evil-"

"Next."

"Nope."

"Fuck no."

Roger, Alissa, and I all answered at the same time, cutting off any additional information that Sally had. Roger and I shared a look, before both of us looked at Alissa, who simply shrugged.

"I dated a guy who liked zombie movies," She explained, answering our unspoken question. "I did have some time to myself before the world went to shit, you know." I couldn't help but chuckle for a moment, before looking back to Sally.

"Yeah... I'm not sure we are ready to tackle a global zombie apocalypse, Sally," I explained. "What's the other option?"

"Well, the other one takes place in the Marvel universe," She answered, which was already a bad start. "The mission would be to Oh... it seems I've stumbled into a doubleheader. It is not the main Marvel reality, but the Marvel Zombies-"

"Are you fucking kidding me?" Roger said, his eyes wide. "Thats... holy fuck, talk about bad luck..."

"Well... Resident Evil it is, I guess," I said, shaking my head, my brain taking a moment to reboot after the shock. "Fucking hell..."

"What's Marvel Zombies?" George asked.

"You know Marvel comics? Spider-man, Iron Man, Thor, Hulk, all those guys?" I asked, waiting for him to nod in understanding. "Great. Now, imagine they are all zombies. With their powers... and still conscious. So they are still thinking and planning. They just also want to eat you."

"... And Resident Evil?" He asked, sounding like he was afraid of what I might say.

"It's... Well, actually, it kind of depends on if it's the games or the movie," I admitted, cutting myself off and looking at Sally. "Which is it? And what's the mission?"

"It is the video game setting," Sally confirmed before continuing, "And your mission would be to escort Dr. Patricia Salinado and her eight-year-old daughter out of Racoon City and to a safe distance before it is destroyed by the nuclear device. She and her daughter must both be uninfected by the time the bombs go off. You would arrive three days before the bomb is dropped, well into the period where the infected were rampant on the streets."

"That... I think... that is may be possible. Is she like an Umbrella employee or a Stars agent or something?" I asked, wondering about any complications.

"No, she is simply a very intelligent doctor," Sally explains. "If she lives, the experience affects her greatly, and she strives to prevent it from ever happening again. I do not know how well she succeeds, but I will hopefully know more after you complete the mission."

I was about to ask another question when I realized we were standing by the doorway, completely stopped in the middle of doing something, and we were burning daylight.

"Sally, I'm gonna have a lot more questions when I get back, but for now, we need to get back to the station," I said. "Alissa, Roger, feel free to ask questions, but make sure you remember anything interesting you learn."

Not much longer after that, we were making our way back to the station. Sarah and Danny were on the bikes with me, while George and Charles were riding the gold cart. As we traveled, the sun was starting to get worryingly low, pushing us to go a little faster than we would have usually. When we finally arrived, we parked the bikes and golf carts, with their attached trailers and carts, behind the station in the parking lot. All four of them fit tucked into a small space along the back wall, hidden from most angles.

When we entered the garage area, I was surprised to see how much better the space looked, with most of the damaged living space cleaned up. The civilians were already setting up cots while a few prepared dinner. The main portion of the meal seemed to be a couple of massive slabs of meat, cut out from the Dino-dogs and hung above a fire pit.

After reuniting with Jessica and Barry, I explained our new jump options. Unsurprisingly, Barry knew both of the settings, at least in passing, while Jessica only knew about Resident Evil by name. Barry cursed up a storm when he recovered from the reveal, wholeheartedly agreeing that Resident Evil was the right choice.

"Three days is enough time to get away... assuming we can get them into a car... Right?" He asked, scratching his chin.

"Probably, I don't think it's a very large nuke," I said. "Though I'll be the first to admit, it's been a long time since I have seen anything to do with that universe, never mind the games that take place in Raccoon City."

Once I had shared the news, we spent the rest of the day's sunlight preparing and eating dinner, as well as getting ready to sleep. Sarah and Charles set up an overnight watch, which my team participated in. George and I got the first watch, both of us climbing up to the roof of the station, where we kept a lookout for two hours. Once we were done with our shift, we headed down and woke up Danny and one of the other firefighters, trading cots with them.

Thankfully, despite the inferior sleeping conditions, most of us slept without too many issues, waking up the next morning mostly refreshed. After a quick breakfast of leftover meat and canned vegetables, we started prepping everyone and everything for transport. It was clear that everyone was nervous, both about the journey and about their new home. Luckily, they seemed to trust Charles and Sarah enough to take their word that the bastion was a better option for them.