

The Fall 217

Chapter 217: Ransacking

Just as he took his first step inside the building his danger sense sparked to life. To Zac's surprise it actually came from behind, rather than from something inside the palace. He stood completely frozen, and a second later a dagger appeared out of nowhere.

It headed straight toward his neck through a brief crack in the defensive wall of the whirling leaves around him. But he was already ready for the attack and quickly moved his head out of the way and simultaneously grabbed the hand holding the weapon.

The next moment he held the rogue who tried to sneak attack him by his neck, and it was actually an Ishiate. Zac frowned a bit over what to do with the beastman draped in black. He was on a good foot with both camps of the beastmen, but that didn't mean that he was going to allow people who tried to kill him to roam free.

The Ishiate was trying to say something, but Zac ignored him as he walked inward, holding his captive as a shield. So far there had been no arrays activating, but he didn't believe that a summit palace would have no protections at all.

He passed the inner courtyard, that seemed to have once been a garden but now was only covered in windswept weeds and twisted trees. As he walked the Ishiate tried to wrest himself free with desperate effort, but a slap on the back of his head rendered him unconscious.

Soon Zac stood in front of the main doors into the proper structure, and he used the unconscious beastman to push the door open. It was a bit callous to use him as a human shield, but the man did try to kill him after all.

Nothing happened as the huge door swung open, but he saw there was a mostly translucent shimmer in the air inside. Something was fishy about it, so Zac splashed some water in the face of the assassin until he woke up, and then unceremoniously threw him inside.

The Ishiate quickly regained his senses, and gracefully twisted in the air to land with his feet down, but the moment he touched the ground it was as though the air itself combusted, causing an inferno to erupt around him.

The assassin screamed and tried to run out again, likely forgetting about the token in his muddled state. Zac waited at the door and struck him dead the moment he came within reach. Next Zac took out one of the soldier corpses and threw it inside as well since he still saw that odd shimmer in the air.

This time nothing happened and the corpse lay in the hall unassailed. Perhaps the arrays were smart enough to not expend their energy on people who were already dead, meaning collecting bodies to test the waters might be useless.

Judging by the half-burned state of the assassin it was a purely offensive array that protected the entrance. Zac was even less worried about those than the mental arrays though, and unhesitantly stepped inside as he infused some of his Dao of Trees into the leaves whirling around him.

A large reason he once chose [Nature's Barrier] before heading to the Dead Zone was that it gained power based on his Endurance, which meant that the skill had received a huge upgrade in the past weeks. The leaves were far sturdier compared to before, and Zac believed not even the dangerous sniper rifles would be able to get through them any longer.

Just like when the Ishiate was thrown inside an inferno erupted around him the moment he took his first step inside, but the leaves staved off most of the flames before they could reach him. Some of it still snuck past though, but between his flame-proof robes and his high Endurance it only stung a bit.

Zac kept walking through the flames for a few seconds. He didn't dare to run since his visibility was practically zero, and there might be more arrays superimposed on the first one. But soon the flames winked out of existence, leaving Zac slightly toasty but otherwise fine.

He found himself in a large hall, but unfortunately there were no piles of wealth lying around. In fact, the whole place felt very austere, with only a couple of paintings similar to the one from the temple adorning the walls. A central staircase stood right in front of him, lined with crystals that gave off a soft glow.

Zac pondered whether to walk up the stairs or head down to some subterranean basement but quickly chose to walk to a higher floor. If this was a medieval castle there might be a treasury at the bottom floor, but with arrays and Cosmic Sacks, it felt more likely the best treasures would be in the owner's quarters.

After trying a few doors upstairs he found the one that should lead to the private area of the owner of the mansion, but the moment he walked through it felt like he was slammed in the head with a hammer. He only saw white until he finally came to again, and after taking a glance at his watch he was shocked to see that he'd been out of it for over 10 minutes.

He was hit with something like a mental concussion attack, and he was lucky he was alone inside the palace. It was a great lesson for him, no place was safe. He once again entered the room, and this time he wasn't attacked.

The room was quite sparse, housing only a desk and some decorative paintings and crystals. He sensed that the crystals in the walls were probably Divine Crystals, but unfortunately the arrays that kept this place going had exhausted pretty much all energy inside them, making them worthless.

He walked over to the chest and found there was a token and a sack on it. The token looked a lot like the depiction of the placements of some array, and it was the same as the design he saw on the front of the Array Crystal he looted earlier.

Zac suspected it was the logo for the Eastern Trigram Sect, and that the sect actually focused on arrays. Either that or this specific mountain housed people who focused on arrays. He picked up the token and imbued some energy into it, and found it was an identification token for an elder.

After a brief hesitation he fastened it to his belt. Perhaps some of the automatic defensive features in the mountains wouldn't harass him if he had this token. Next he eagerly grabbed the Cosmos sack, but it also turned into a stream of light and entered his temporary sacks.

He touched his sack to check out the contents. Most of the space occupied was the huge tiles currently, and they were neatly ordered in a corner. There were also assortments of low-grade weapons with some basic equipment like tents and bandages, and Zac guessed that was the things from the sacks he had stolen so far.

There was also another corner that was filled with a respectable pile of Nexus Crystals and a few crystals. They actually looked like skill crystals, and he took one out. But as soon as he tried to glance at its contents he was blocked.

It was as though the information was protected by a password, or rather a riddle. He received a stream of information that essentially told him that he needed to gain a certain understanding of arrays in order to get past the protection. It was something like the trials that they would have Brazla perform to gain access to the Repository skills in the future.

There were also a couple of normal notepads and vials with pills inside. Finally, there was a densely inscribed metal ball inside, and Zac curiously took it out. The moment he held it in his hand he couldn't help grunting because he was barely able to hold on to it. It was extremely heavy, making it feel like he was carrying one of those stones for strongman competitions. That was saying something with his monstrous attributes, and Zac figured it must be made from some Spiritual Grade metals.

He had no idea what it was, and it provided no information for it either. After looking it over he put it back. For all he knew it could be a bomb, and he didn't want to carry it in his arms. Zac looked through all drawers on the desk afterward but found nothing interesting besides a large feather that might have been used as a pencil before.

There was also a door that led to an inner room, and after stripping the paintings from the wall he walked inside. It was a meditation chamber with a beautiful panoramic view of the surrounding mountains. There was also a similar mat as the one he had already taken, and he quickly snatched that one as well. Unfortunately, there were no hidden treasures beneath it as with the other one.

He was about to head back but some change in the periphery of his vision made him curiously look over. Something was happening on another mountain. A huge fire had flashed into existence in an instance, spreading over a hundred meters. Zac could even hear the explosion two mountains over.

Looked like someone with pretty decent power was flexing his or her muscles. As Zac was looking more closely at the mountains he actually saw a little bit of movement here and there. Things were really kicking into motion, filling Zac with some eagerness to move on to the next place.

Zac scoured the palace for anything else of value, but he couldn't find it. He did find some exquisite furniture in a dining room though, and unceremoniously threw everything inside the pouch. There was no need to be discerning with the gargantuan space inside, and anything that caught his eye went into the sack.

Since he was done he exited the same way he came, but to his surprise two people stood outside carefully looking at the entrance. However, when they saw Zac emerging their brows rose and they quickly used some sort of escape skill without hesitation, making Zac unable to guess where they went.

Zac tried to figure out their tracks for a bit, but that wasn't his strong suit. Instead, he headed down the mountain in the opposite direction from the one he came from. If that duo wanted to they were welcome to follow so that he could loot their pouches as well.

The direction Zac walked was partly chosen due to not wanting double-track, but also that one of the mountains in this direction looked caught his eyes earlier. It was extremely steep, with a modest mansion on top. The thing that drew his attention though was the hidden hanging fields that seemed to be cut inside the mountain itself, and apparently only accessible from the palace above.

He couldn't really tell from the distance, but it truly looked like fields made for growing Spiritual herbs. Perhaps the fields were holding untold treasures since Spiritual Herbs generally grew stronger the higher their age was. Herbs that had absorbed Cosmic Energy for thousands of years would each be worth a fortune, and he couldn't stop a creepy smile from appearing on his face as he thought about looting a whole field of them.

That very smile seemed to have an astounding effect since he ran into a young girl who was furtively climbing toward the peak he just left. The moment he saw Zac with his grin she flinched in fright, and unhesitantly crushed the token in her hands.

Zac didn't even have time to react before the girl winked out of existence. Her sudden disappearance made Zac more certain about his hypothesis that the delay was dependent on power or wealth, as the girl seemed to be a real weakling, to the point she actually walked with her token in hand.

As he descended the mountain there wasn't really anything really worth noting. There was another temple at the mid-way point, but it was reduced to only rubble. Zac briefly tried to look through the ruins for some more treasure, but the hanging gardens were beckoning him, and he quickly gave up the idea of a proper excavation.

Finally, after a mad dash he found himself at the foot of the mountain, and to his delight it was teeming with beasts. He saw tens of the black rats frenziedly rip apart the carcass of a large bear, and the next moment he was attacked by a pack of wolves.

It was as though the crevices between the mountains were made out of natural barriers of beasts. Unless one had decent power or a larger group it would be suicide to try to change mountain to explore. Seeing this many targets for grinding his ladder position he wanted to just go on a rampage, but he stopped himself.

Getting a high position on the Hunter ladder this early wasn't necessarily a good thing. People would run for the hills if they spotted him, making it harder for him to liberate people from their cosmos sacks. Instead, his eyes turned up toward the gardens that were no longer visible from this vantage.

Zac had his axe in his hand and greed in his eyes, so a corridor of carnage was quickly carved toward the neighboring mountain.