

## The Fall 220

### Chapter 220: Jackpot

Thea looked at him aghast, seemingly not able to comprehend what was happening.

"It's an antidote pill," Zac said as he paled a bit. "Or rather a poison pill that blocks other poisons. Kind of fight fire with fire. Do you need one?"

It was something he'd gotten after Alea poisoned him. It wasn't specifically to protect against her, but he felt he needed some precautions. He'd been poisoned without even noticing it, and there wasn't much he could do about it after the fact.

Unfortunately, pills that gave immunity to most poisons were extremely expensive. What he swallowed instead was actually a mild poison. It gave similar effects to food poisoning, but that wasn't why he took it.

The poison also had the effect that it blocked up his pores, essentially stopping most poison to enter through the air or touch. It was a much cheaper alternative to the antidotes and a popular addition to most wandering cultivator's survival kits.

"I'd rather get poisoned than eat that," Thea said with disgust, instead taking out a hazmat suit.

Zac looked upon it with interest. It looked like it was made before the integration, but someone had added rudimentary inscriptions to it. It was clear that the Marhsall Clan hadn't been idle, but rather making inroads in all sorts of things.

"Prototype Hazmat suit," Thea said with some pride after seeing Zac's gaze. "The fractals protect against tears and makes the material even less porous. It stops most particles from passing through. It was made by our research department not long ago."

"Pretty impressive," Zac muttered as he tried to ignore his churning stomach.

He didn't want to stay any longer and walked right into the array after taking a deep breath. Due to whatever Thea did with her skill it was extremely clear where the array started and where it stopped. However, something unexpected happened after the two were in the middle of the array.

A tremendous pressure descended upon them, actually forcing Zac down on his knees. Thea was far worse off and immediately was pushed down prone on the ground. There was another hidden array that she had missed.

Its effect was exactly the same as his Gravity array back at the academy, but its effect was supercharged. It was so bad that Thea was barely able to breathe, only able to take in shallow breaths. It was a simple but effective combination. A poison that could kill any trespassers, and a gravity array to keep the trespassers inside the poison until they had to breath.

Zac arduously got back on his feet, the veins in his head almost popping from the strain. The ground cracked under his weight, and it felt like he was carrying a mountain just by standing up. He slowly walked over to the prone Thea, who helplessly looked up.

Zac bent down with a grunt, but he was actually unable to lift her. He had enough problems keeping himself up, and it was just impossible to add the weight of another to the tally. The extreme exertion from standing inside the gravity array was also quickly depleting his oxygen, and he was already feeling the need to breathe.

Zac shook his head and quickly walked back outside, all the while feeling the burning gaze of Thea. He quickly released his breath and took a new mouthful of air as he looked around before activating [Hatchetman's Fury].

He hadn't expected to need to use his boost skill for something like this, but there wasn't much to do about it. He would just have to lay low for a bit afterward. Violent impulses started to emerge in his mind as he gained a considerable boost in power, but he forcefully pushed them down.

He took another deep breath of air and walked inside the arrays once again. This time he had no problem to walk since he'd gained almost 100 additional strength from the activation of the skill. It even looked like the poisonous air was pushed away by the power billowing out from his body.

He soon found Thea again, who hesitantly held her token in her hand while still stuck to the ground. But when she saw Zac reappear her eyes slightly widened and she put away the token once again. Zac didn't comment, but only went down and lifted her up from the ground with a grunt.

He hurriedly walked further inside the temple, but it was clear that this array was far thicker than the one he passed on the other mountain. Some nervousness started to build as the seconds passed. If he was still inside the array when the buff ran out he might be in trouble since he wouldn't be able to move due to the period of weakness.

However, luckily his fears were unfounded as he finally felt the huge pressure lift, almost making him fall over. Zac let Thea down and she plopped down on the ground and panted heavily. Zac couldn't really see through the hazmat suit, but he couldn't imagine being put through so much pressure could be good for her wounds.

"Are you okay?" he hesitantly asked.

"I'll be fine," Thea said. "Thank you for coming back."

"It's fine, I just needed to take a new breath," Zac answered, but immediately after he paled and coughed a couple of times.

"Are you poisoned?" Thea asked with worry as she stood up.

"No, I'm fine. I just overextended myself a bit," Zac said with a sigh as he took out a normal healing pill.

The pills helped somewhat with the aftereffects from [Hatchetman's Rage], but in the end it was limited since he wasn't hurt, but rather expended. However, it was better than nothing, and Zac wanted to stay in as good shape as possible even if he needed to waste some resources.

Besides, it helped alleviate the effects of the poison pill, which might be equally important since he wasn't in the mood to poop his pants in front of a girl.

Thea looked at him with somewhat of a frown, but she didn't comment as she took off her Hazmat suit. Zac looked around while she was busy, and he finally noticed they had entered what looked like paradise.

It felt like they were inside one of some botanical gardens, with a wide variety of fantastical plants and flowers. The courtyard was an explosion of color and smells, almost enough to dizzy the senses. However, Zac could conclude after a brief look that these flowers weren't Spiritual Herbs, but rather mortal flora.

He'd somewhat expected an alchemist or poison master to have high-grade flowers for decorations, but perhaps it was bad for the Cosmic Energy density. In any case, it was a beautiful scene, and Zac and Thea leisurely walked along the path toward the building proper.

Zac felt it was a bit confusing why the garden looked so pristine. It was the complete opposite to the run-down temples of the first mountain. He realized he'd just assumed that there would be no native people around due to how everything looked when he first arrived, but what if that wasn't the case?

They might very well have just barged in on some poison master's private property. Zac started to get a sinking feeling as he warily looked around, trying to rouse his weakened body. A sudden rustle made Zac unhesitantly activate [Nature's Barrier], startling Thea into a defensive posture as well.

A second later they saw a figure slowly approach them. However, it's appearance was a bit unexpected, making Zac slightly lower his guard. It was a run-down golem that was currently carrying a bucket of water and a pair of shears.

"Hello? Do you live here?" Zac hesitantly asked.

However, the golem completely ignored the two until it sat down some distance from them and started tending a hedge. Zac and Thea observed it for a bit longer and tried various means to communicate with it. However, the golem completely ignored them while it tended to its task with great meticulousness.

"I don't think it's sapient," Thea hesitantly said after they had observed its actions for a bit longer.

"Might be like a servant robot or something?" Zac agreed. "That would explain why the place still looks nice."

"Yeah, but that might mean there are guard robots as well," Thea said with a frown. "Are you in condition to fight?"

"Not at full force for the time being," Zac admitted. "But as long as any defenders aren't past early E-Grade I'll be able to handle it."

"Monster," Thea muttered in annoyance.

Even though there were golems working in the garden they didn't stop. The enticement of ancient Spiritual Herbs was just too big to ignore. Luckily they were completely unaccosted as they walked into the palace, with the golems actually bowing and moving out of the way as they passed.

The insides were well-tended as well, with well-oiled furniture and potted flowers creating a cozy atmosphere. Zac's fingers started to itch when he saw all the high-quality furniture and decorations. But next his eyes hesitantly switched to a golem that was currently sweeping the floor.

“Do you think the golems would care if I took the furniture?” Zac said.

“The furniture? Why would you want that?” Thea asked with confusion. “When John and I checked the last mountain they barely had any value.”

“Well, I still haven’t decorated my place,” Zac said, drawing a raised brow from Thea. “I mean I’ve been busy with closing incursions and stuff.”

“I don’t think it’s worth risking getting hounded by a bunch of robots so that you can get a new ottoman for your guest room,” Thea said with a shake of her head.

“I’ll just pick them up on the way out,” Zac muttered under his breath. “Rich people don’t know how to be thrifty.”

“Robbing someone’s home is being thrifty?” Thea snorted. “And last time I checked you’ve been in the first spot of the Wealth ladder since day one, no matter how much you spent at the Auction. We know for a fact that Thomas Fischer held over 100 million Nexus coins for a brief moment, but even that wasn’t enough to overtake you.”

Zac looked over surprised. One hundred million coins weren’t peanuts, and it was pretty impressive that the Government Leader managed to get a hold of that much.

“How do you know that?” Zac asked curiously.

“Spies and having people keeping constant watch of the ladders,” Thea said with a shrug as she walked through a doorway into a large dining area. “The government mapped out everyone’s wealth by increasing Thomas’ wealth incrementally a few days after the Auction. Of course, you’re an exception since they couldn’t pass your wealth.”

“That’s a pretty smart idea,” Zac said with praise.

“It doesn’t work with factions like my family or a few of the other independent established forces. We spread out our Nexus Coins, apart from Grandpa who decided to put himself at the top ten of the Wealth ladder as a show of strength,” Thea added she looked around for any hidden compartments or treasures.

“Wait, another array,” Thea suddenly said as she stopped in front of a nondescript door.

Zac curiously walked over, trying to gain any insight from what might be inside from the door, but it truly looked just like any other door in this place. They had opened a few of them and most were just guest rooms or even empty.

“Can you see what type?” Zac asked as he looked at it.

“Pure defensive shield, we need to find the weak spots in order to-” Thea started explaining, but was interrupted by Zac punching the shield with enough force to kill an elephant, causing some tremors in the building.

The array cracked like a mirror, giving the two access to the room within.

"You fool, what if you alert all the golems?" Thea said as she agitatedly looked around, the air around her humming.

Zac noticed the odd phenomenon and remembered his and Ogras' discussions about Thea's weapon. There was likely some sort of daggers swiveling around her at all times, providing both offense and defense at any time. It was worth remembering, as that meant he could be attacked at moment's notice, though Zac doubted Thea would do something like that from their interactions.

"It worked didn't it?" Zac said with a small smile and pushed open the door.

However, he didn't step inside, and instead only looked at the room with a gaping mouth. Thea walked up next to him and her face soon mirrored his own.

"Jackpot!"