

## The Fall 221

### Chapter 221: Public Enemy Number One

Zac had called the palace the Alchemist Palace in his mind, and this room was a final confirmation that he'd been right on the money. It was clear that they had found an alchemist's workshop.

Thick bundles of herbs were hanging from the roof, and they were likely the cause of the thick scent in the room. Unfortunately they looked completely dried out, and it was unclear whether there was any medicinal efficacy left in them. Along the walls were a few tables full of scrolls and crystals, perhaps containing recipes or experiment notes. There were also vials all over the place, from on shelves to strewn on the ground.

However, the clearest indicator that this truly was an alchemist's workshop was the large lidded cauldron in the middle of the room. It was half a meter high and circular, had four stout legs that lifted it a few decimeters up in the air, and there were intricate engravings covering the whole thing from top to bottom.

Cauldrons were used by an overwhelming majority of all alchemists when producing pills, and many were even more expensive than Spiritual Tools. Zac had heard of a few master alchemists who didn't need them any longer and were able to form pills by only using their Cosmic Energy and skills, but these masters were an extremely small minority. Besides, even if those people could concoct pills without a cauldron they would probably still use it for their more important crafts.

The purpose of cauldrons was to make the pill-making process easier and could contain all sorts of inscriptions for this purpose. They could improve heat control, gather Cosmic Energy to infuse into the pills, or just have all kinds of measures to stabilize the highly volatile process of extracting the useful components from herbs.

The cauldron looked quite extravagant, but Zac didn't have the knowledge to appraise it. He immediately wanted to step inside, but suddenly stopped and hesitantly looked over at Thea.

"How do we decide the split?" Zac asked.

Unless they reached an accord their cooperation would quickly crumble.

"You saved my life, so I won't take anything from this mountain," Thea said, not seeming to care the slightest about the loss of treasure. "If we find something that will help me heal I'd like it though."

"You sure?" Zac said, not being able to help to become slightly suspicious. "You really don't want anything from all this?"

"It's just the first day, there are so many mountains to loot. Losing out on one isn't the end," Thea said as she threw Zac a look of disdain. "Paranoia isn't a good look, by the way."

Zac scratched his chin a bit embarrassed. Ogras and the recent events had indeed made him a bit more paranoid. But after being stabbed by both a Janos impersonator and his ex he felt a healthy amount of paranoia was a bit warranted. You never knew when a dagger was coming for you, and he might not be lucky and turn into his Draugr form next time.

But he also knew that Thea had a stellar reputation. From what he'd gathered during his travels he learned she was known as a lone warrior who didn't play politics. She only focused on getting stronger and defeating the foreign invaders, which garnered a lot of respect in Kingsbury.

Of course, that was just the public image. There were so many hypocrites in the world who worked hard to keep a certain appearance to the public when they were snakes in reality. However, Zac didn't get that impression from the girl next to him and felt that the public perception was pretty close to reality.

He didn't have any good response to what she said and instead quickly walked inside the workshop. The room had an extremely dense smell of herbs and pills, making Zac wonder just how many pills had been created in this small room.

He wasted no time and went through the room like a hurricane. Zac left nothing behind, not even the empty vials. Even the tables and bookshelves went into the sack, making Zac smile in glee. Only when he'd swept everything apart from the Cauldron into his pouch did he stop and check his ladder position.

From looting a hundred corpses outside and the workshop Zac had jumped up all the way to the 27th spot on the gatherer ladder. It wasn't actually as high as he'd expected since this was the second summit palace he looted. It looked like many others had caught lucky breaks.

Next, he put the Cauldron into his sack, and he was shocked to see that he jumped all the way to the 5th position. It was clear that the cauldron was a true treasure in the eyes of the system, likely above anything he'd found so far. He couldn't help but look over at Thea, who only calmly looked at him wearing his money-crazed grin.

"Looks like the Cauldron was a good thing. The Marshall clan would like to buy it at a later date if you find no use for it," she said with an even voice.

"I'll keep it in mind," Zac said.

He currently didn't have anyone that focused on alchemy back home, but perhaps that was only a matter of time. People with side professions would likely pop up sooner or later on his island. From what he understood some people started to focus on other things apart from their class at higher grades.

It became increasingly arduous to level up, and gaining all the levels in the E-Grade Class was expected to take a couple of decades. And even after that there was the extremely difficult bottleneck of reaching the D-Grade Class that could keep people stuck for hundreds of years or the rest of their lives.

If one only focused on the same Daos or breaking through the bottleneck you'd go crazy over time, so people found other pursuits to relax their minds or gain new inspirations. Sometimes those hobbies became such a large part of their lives that they actually changed over from being a warrior to focusing on things such as arrays or blacksmithing instead.

The two kept looking through every nook and cranny of the house, but they couldn't find anything else of value inside. Thea even used some sort of scouting skill to look for hidden passages or arrays that might indicate spots with value, but she couldn't find anything.

Finally they went out the back, that also had a beautiful garden. Zac couldn't help but look over at the golem who was raking a path, wondering if he should try throwing them into his pouch as well. It would

be great to have a couple of these things on his compound to beautify and maintain the place without him having to worry about spies or assassins among them.

Soon they reached the edge of the garden, and behind it was an almost completely vertical cliff. Zac could see the mountain he started at from this vantage, meaning that the garden he saw cut into the mountain should be right below him.

He started to scrutinize the cliff, even peering over it to find any method to get down there. But the wall was completely sheer, not providing any opportunities to get down. The only method he could think of was to use a couple of weapons to create footholds as he traversed the mountain down. But even with his monstrous attributes he was a bit leery about that idea.

“What are you doing?” Thea asked curiously after seeing his antics for a while.

“I started on that mountain over there,” Zac pointed. “I saw there was a hidden garden cut into the mountain itself. I suspect the good things are kept there. But I can’t find any way down, so I’m thinking of cutting footholds into the mountain to get down.”

“Well, there might not be any path down if the original owner was a D-Grade Alchemist. They can fly with the help of Cosmic Energy, after all,” Thea said after mulling it over.

“What, really? All of them?” Zac said looking back at Thea with excitement.

“Well, yeah, from what the Tutorial pixies inferred at least,” Thea said with a nod. “They used it as an enticement to get stronger and take the more difficult trials. Some classes might gain skills on E-Grade that could help them fly as well, but that usually expends energy very quickly.”

“That’s pretty cool,” Zac commented, before resuming scrutinizing the wall.

“Wait, over there,” Thea said, pointing at a large tree.

“What?” Zac asked with confusion after looking over.

It looked normal and was the same as a couple of similar ones they’d seen in the back yard.

“Something is odd about it, but I can’t put my finger on it,” she said after some hesitation.

Zac had some faith in Thea’s scouting abilities by now and immediately walked over to the tree. He hesitated for a second before he touched it, but he didn’t feel anything odd about it. He’d first thought that it might be an illusion array or fake tree, but he knew he was touching real bark.

“The leaves!” Thea suddenly exclaimed. “Why are the leaves already falling on this tree? The leaves on the other trees had just started to turn red. Besides, why is it so close to the edge? Shouldn’t the ground beneath us be solid stone? Otherwise, the cliff would collapse.”

Zac looked up, and it was true. The tree truly differed from the others in that sense. It was an odd mystery, but it didn’t really help him in finding a way down to the garden. Zac had an idea though and closed his eyes while keeping contact with the tree.

Only seconds later his eyes opened with surprise. It was truly a tree, but it was actually hollow. It appeared the owner had somehow grown a hidden pathway inside the tree itself, but that caused it to

not be as healthy as the other trees in the mansion. He jumped up a couple of meters and looked inside, and actually found a hidden staircase leading down into the darkness.

"There are stairs leading down," Zac said with excitement as he peered down at the waiting Thea.

This was like a real-life treasure hunt, and Zac couldn't help but forget the cruel battles that would take place over the coming month. This was something that many kids would dream of finding while playing in the woods. A magical staircase inside a tree leading to hidden treasure.

"I'll stay here and recuperate," Thea said as she sat down under the tree.

Zac was a bit surprised and looked down at her, and finally noticed she was noticeably paler compared to before, and she had deep rings under her eyes. The excitement of finding treasure had made him forget she almost died an hour ago, and she was far from healed. But even then she hadn't complained and even expended Cosmic Energy to look for hidden spaces.

"Okay, I'll be back soon," Zac said as he walked inside the staircase with some shame. Hopefully, he'd find something down in the gardens that could help with her condition.

The hidden path was pitch black and cramped, and Zac missed the foothold only after a couple of steps.

"SHIT!" he screamed as he tumbled down the stairs until he managed to grab hold of the wall.

"Are you okay?" He heard from above and looked up to see Thea peering inside the trunk.

"I just missed the steps, don't worry. Talk to you later," Zac said with some embarrassment and hurried down.

Soon he found himself at the bottom of the staircase, and it clearly led out to the hidden garden. But he hesitated whether he should just exit. In a very short time he'd grown accustomed Thea's observational skills, and was a bit leery to just brute force it.

But soon he regained his courage as he smelled the extremely intoxicating herbal aroma coming from the garden outside. He grit his teeth and exited, his defensive skills working to their fullest. But he breathed out when nothing happened, and he could get a proper look on the garden for the first time.

He realized it would be more appropriate to call it fields rather than gardens, as the area was clearly demarked into four Zones growing three different kinds of Spiritual Herbs. There likely had once been four, but one of the fields was completely barren.

Interestingly enough the soil in all four of them differed as well, and when he walked through the fields it was as though he was transported to various topographies. The first field had pitch-black soil with a hint of blue, and it grew something that looked like bamboo.

The bamboo poles weren't actually that tall, only reaching roughly five meters in height. But they weren't green like those on earth, and instead had a light blue color. More importantly, they emitted an intensely cold aura, and his hand was actually getting frostbite just after touching one for a few seconds.

He pondered a bit on what to do as he looked at the trees before taking out his axe. The correct handling of Spiritual Herbs was an art, and some herbs could lose much of its efficacy by incorrect harvesting. But he didn't really have any options apart from doing it as carefully and quickly as possible.

One by one he cut the bamboo trunks down and immediately put them into his pouch before they had the chance to leak any energy, and in just 10 minutes the whole field was harvested. He even rounded up most of the soil and threw it inside as well, since it seemed to be a big part of why the small area felt like a glacier.

Like this Zac covered the whole hidden garden like a locust, and when he was done only four pits remained. Zac looked around for any more hidden passages, but it appeared this was it. But he wasn't dissatisfied with the returns, just the opposite.

He'd soared all the way to the first spot on the Gatherer list, and in a sense became public enemy number one.