

The Fall 227

Chapter 227: Silver Rivers

For a second Zac imagined robots running rampant through the hunt, but he soon realized he wasn't looking at some advanced automatons. Instead he noticed that those in pursuit might actually be humans who had painted themselves silver for some reason.

But something was extremely off about them. Their gazes were extremely lifeless, and they didn't show a single expression as they hounded the group in front. Zac looked over to Thea who frowned as she observed the pursuit.

"Did you notice? Those silver people do not have ladder positions. I think they are corpses or puppets," Thea hesitantly said.

Zac's brows rose in surprise as he looked over at the metallic men again, and it was true. None of the silver humans had any ladder positions, meaning that they either weren't part of the hunt or transformed dead. Zac wasn't sure whether he wanted to be involved with this strange event, but after a brief hesitation he shook his head and flashed over with [Loamwalker].

The next moment he had caught one of the fleeing men, just like he had with so many others during the hunt. The Ishiate and other humans gawked when they saw Zac appear out of nowhere, but they didn't even stop for a fraction of a second. They just kept running as fast as their legs allowed, completely leaving their companion to his fate.

"Please let me go, they'll catch us. They are too strong!" the man desperately shouted as struggled to get free, and when he noticed Zac's arm was tougher than steel he tried to take out his token.

However, Zac snatched the token from his captive with practiced ease before he took out [Verun's Bite]. A second later a huge fractal edge sailed toward the silver cultivators, who now were less than a hundred meters away from him.

There was still no sign of reaction from the silver cultivators and their faces looked completely unperturbed by the incoming attack. But two of the pursuers jumped forward to block the fractal edge with their bodies. Zac could only snort when he saw their tactic, scoffing at the hubris of thinking only two people could stop his attacks.

But the next moment his brows rose in surprise.

The two guards actually self-detonated, and them exploding was barely enough to destroy Zac's fractal edge. Zac could only stupidly stare at the display, and he was now pretty sure that Thea was correct in her assertion that these things were dead. That two people would voluntarily use their bodies as fodder to stop an attack without a care in the world was pretty unlikely.

The others pushed through the cloud of dust that the explosion kicked up in the air, still trying to catch their prey. But it wasn't an even fight just because the silver cultivators managed to intercept the first edge, and soon all the odd puppets were destroyed.

Strangely enough they didn't leave any corpses when they died, but instead just turned into silver clouds that drifted up into the air. Zac was afraid it was some sort of last-ditch poison attack and stayed clear of the silver gases as they slowly dissipated.

However, his captive didn't seem relieved at all that Zac had made short work of the attackers, and still fearfully looked back up toward the summit. It was the same with the others in his party. None of them came back after Zac destroyed the silver puppets, and they were quickly running further and further away.

"Thank you, friend, but please let me go before their leader arrives with the real army. We must get as far away from this mountain as possible," the man said with his eyes fretfully looking up at the summit.

"Army? Is it one of the Medhin Royals?" Zac asked. "Are they wearing golden robes?"

"No, it's not one of them. This is much worse! Please, we must flee before he turns us into puppets as well!"

Zac frowned and looked over at Thea, who shrugged in response. She hadn't heard of anyone like that either.

"Puppets? How many has he turned into puppets?" Zac asked.

"Hundreds and hundreds, perhaps a thousand. He has a whole army of silver corpses like these ones," the man hurriedly said as he gestured at the things Zac killed. "We barely got away since he was busy turning another group into puppets as well, but he was raving about turning everyone into silver guards."

Zac had no reason to keep the man, and simply let him go after asking a few more questions. It truly didn't seem like it was a Medhin royal, but someone else. The captive only said that the leader looked like a hobo but his army was insanely powerful. As for the army, the only thing in common was that they were all silver.

The moment the man was freed by Zac he bolted so quickly that it almost looked like he would take flight. His mad dash was so frantic that he stumbled on a root after only fifty meters and slammed straight into the ground. But he apparently was so afraid that he didn't care about the blood flowing from his nose and only scrambled to his feet to keep running.

Zac frowned as he looked at the fleeing back of the man, before turning back to Thea.

"What do you think?" Zac asked.

"Not sure. But it is clearly someone powerful to have been able to capture hundreds of people. Hypnotist? Necromancer?" she guessed. "In any case, he should fight with numbers, which might make him similar to the Medhin royals."

"Should we avoid him?"

"No," Thea said resolutely. "He's turning humans into puppets, killing indiscriminately. He needs to be stopped."

"Fine, let's go," Zac said as he took out his axe as he looked up toward the summit.

He agreed with Thea's decision. Someone like this couldn't be left to their own devices. Besides, he'd already decided that he should improve his returns in this hunt by hunting the powerhouses, and now was as good a time to start as any. He didn't want to let the Medhin emperor get the best rewards from the hunt, and if this lunatic had found and killed almost a thousand people he should be extremely rich as well by the sheer quantity of treasure.

The two didn't encounter any more parties as they ascended the mountain. Perhaps it meant that this leader up ahead was confident that the small squad of silver men would be able to capture their prey.

But that also raised the question of just how those things functioned. The man that Zac captured said that the silver puppets were dead, but they seemed somewhat intelligent from how they responded to Zac's attack. One possibility was that the leader could control them remotely, and even see what they saw through their eyes.

Zac guessed they would learn which was the case depending on whether there was a trap waiting for them at the top of the mountain. Luckily everything was calm when they reached the summit, and they slowly made their way forward until they found a hidden vantage behind some windswept bushes to scout the summit.

Zac immediately saw the man earlier had been telling the truth. There were almost a thousand of the silver corpses lined up at the square in front of the summit's palace. Furthermore, Zac realized that all kinds of people were represented among the army, increasing the likelihood that these were people that had been caught and turned into puppets.

There were humans from both worlds judging by their attire, and there were also quite a few Ishiate and Zhix, though no Anointed stood among the silver ranks. Curiously enough there were also a few extremely pale humanoids that reached roughly to Zac's chest.

His best guess was that these things were Ratmen or Molemen going by their hunched over posture and long tails, but they didn't exactly match the descriptions he heard from the Valkyries about their battles at the Ratmen Incursion. They had more human-like features, and they seemed to be completely hairless. The real Ratmen were essentially enormous bipedal rats.

It wasn't a species that Zac had ever heard of before, and he guessed these things were either from the other world or something local that lived in these mountains. But even these odd things weren't what truly drew Zac's attention. It was the supposed leader sitting in front of them on the ground with his eyes closed.

At first look one might think that the man was a captive, going by how he looked. He was even worse than Zac's appearance back when he used a disgusting snake-skin for armor and was always caked in blood. It was to the point that Zac even couldn't make out the man's ethnicity or features since he was just way too dirty, and the only reason Zac knew it was a man was that he had a large grimy beard.

The man had black shoulder-long hair that was so oily that it looked wet, and the only thing he was dressed in was a large piece of cloth that Zac assumed might have been white once upon a time. However, Zac didn't relax when he saw the pathetic appearance of the leader but instead secured the grip of his axe with a somber expression.

The man emitted a chaotic power that even made Zac slightly apprehensive. The freely released aura around the hobo was clearly weaker than his own, but it was something very off about it, almost feeling like a sickness.

Zac also realized that there would be no option for a sneak attack, as the man soon opened his eyes and looked straight at the two of them in their hiding spot with a smile. There was undisguised insanity in his eyes, and Zac couldn't help but shudder when he met the crazed gaze.

"Welcome, lost lambs," the man said, slowly getting up on his feet. "I saw you stop my silver guards. Are you here to make amends by joining the unity?"

"Who are you, and what have you done with all these people?" Zac asked as he left his hiding spot and walked onto the large square on the summit, Thea soon following behind him.

"I am Salvation, prophet of the Great Redeemer," the man proclaimed with a grand voice, the madness in his eyes burning even brighter. "These ones have been freed from the curse of sapience, and have joined the eternal unity."

"So you are Salvation," Zac said, and without another word unleashed a fractal edge straight at the man, hoping to cut the head of the snake.

However, a hundred of the silver people behind him wordlessly slapped their hands together and an extremely thick shield appeared in front of their leader, effortlessly stopping his attack.

"Oh, you are quite powerful," the grimy man said while looking at Zac with a burning gaze. "Have the Great Redeemer provided me with the first Golden Guard?"

Zac didn't comment on Salvation's rambling and instead spoke to Thea with a low voice, without taking his eye off his target.

"I'll clash head-on, see if you can find any opportunities from the flank."

Thea nodded and actually disappeared by turning translucent. It was the first time Zac had seen her use this skill, and he had to admit it suited herself and her weapon quite well. But there was no time for admiration as part of the army suddenly stretched their hands into the air like they were trying to grasp something above them.

The next moment they literally melted into a silver river that started floating around Salvation, making his robes flutter in the wind. The liquid metal that the soldiers turned into emitted the chaotic energies that he sensed from Salvation himself, though it was even stronger.

"Those cursed by their clamoring souls are always led astray. But all will be brought to the fold," Salvation said as he pointed at Zac, and part of the silver river shot toward him with shocking speed, transforming into a huge lance heading straight toward him.

Zac summoned another fractal edge with [Chop] and swung it head-on to meet the incoming attack. But the moment the two forces clashed Zac's brows rose in alarm from the pure force contained in Salvation's silver lance.

The power pushed Zac back over fifty meters, and the shockwave from the clash causing widespread destruction of the square on the summit. Zac's hands were even shaking from the strain of holding the attack at bay, but it was also clear that there was a limit to the power of the river.

Zac noted that the river had shrunk by around ten percent after the clash, with some silver steam dissipating into the air just like when he destroyed the puppets at the foot of the mountain. But the next moment the river was reinforced by more silver men liquefying and joining the river.

From there on Zac didn't have much time to analyze the situation as the silver river was trying to attack him from all angles like a rabid beast.