

The Fall 230

Chapter 230: Out of the Frying Pan

Zac started absorbing energy for his core the moment that they settled in for the night, holding a divine crystal in one hand and a miasma crystal in the other. As soon as the core was filled up he began the process of turning back to a human again.

Since he had already turned he first thought about staying that way for a while. He could take the opportunity to both gain a couple of levels and work on his quests. However, in the end he decided against it, which was why he was currently emptying himself of miasma from all his pores.

There were a few reasons to this. The most important was the safety issue. There were dangers both known and unknown prowling the mountains, and his combat prowess was far higher in his human form. Perhaps that would change in the future, but for now it was safer to have access to his Hatchetman class. He only had one skill at the moment, and Zac believed that the best use for [Deathwish] was to handle large groups of weaker enemies.

Secondly, there was the issue of Thea. He had already explained that he had gained the ability to gain a second life by turning to an undead, but he never mentioned anything about a second class. He was therefore a bit leery about grinding his class while traveling with her.

She had proven herself to be a solid ally through thick and thin during the hunt, but she had also realized that family was extremely important to her, even if she was a bit of a loner. If he for some reason came at odds against the Marshall Clan she would stand with them, and he was unwilling to show all his cards at this juncture. He knew he'd already slipped up a couple of times by now, but he could only channel his inner Ogras and strive to do better from now on.

A cloud of miasma was slowly gathering above Zac as he expelled everything in his body until his vision once again began swimming and he lost consciousness. When he woke up again he was relieved to find that he wasn't bound like the last time, but Thea was still sitting close-by observing him.

"Pretty impressive," she commented when she noticed that Zac was back to being a bonafide human. "Are you able to turn into anything else as well?"

"I'm not some shapeshifter," Zac muttered as he cracked his neck.

He truly needed to find a better method for the change. Having to die just to turn was a huge pain in the ass, and it felt extremely uncomfortable as well. Every cell in his body screamed for sustenance, but he had to repress those basic impulses and let his body slowly get drained.

"So what's next?" Thea said as she started setting up her tent.

They were inside a small house at the foot of a mountain, but she still chose to erect her one-man tent. She had done the same every night since they started traveling together, and Zac guessed she wanted some privacy as she slept. He knew it wasn't an issue of not wanting to get dirtied by the floor beneath since he'd seen her caked in both blood and grime the last days without as much as lifting an eyebrow.

"Nothing's really changed. We should start hitting the top tier palaces again if you're up for it," Zac said after mulling it over for a bit.

Thea nodded before she got into her tent, leaving Zac to take the first watch.

Zac sat down next to the doorway of the structure as he looked out into the darkness. The darkness this night didn't seem very oppressive and he could spot the weak stars in the sky, meaning that there probably wouldn't be a nightly assault this day.

Since he had some time to spare he decided to go over his gains from the past day, and first opened his status screen.

Name

Zachary Atwood

Level

62

Class

[F-Rare] Hatchetman

Race

[E] Human

Alignment

[Earth] Port Atwood - Lord

Titles

Born for Carnage, Ultimate Reaper, Luck of the Draw, Giantsbane, Disciple of David, Overpowered, Slayer of Leviathans, Adventurer, Demon Slayer I, Full of Class, Rarified Being, Trailblazer, Child of Dao, The Big 500, Planetary Aegis, One Against Many, Butcher, Progenitor Noblesse, Duplicity Core, Apex Hunter, Heaven's Chosen

Dao

Seed of Heaviness - Middle, Seed of Trees - High, Seed of Sharpness - Early

Core

[F] Duplicity

Strength

370 [Efficiency: 116%]

Dexterity

221 [Efficiency: 116%]

Endurance

375 [Efficiency: 116%]

Vitality

239 [Efficiency: 116%]

Intelligence

90 [Efficiency: 116%]

Wisdom

85 [Efficiency: 116%]

Luck

93 [Efficiency: 116%]

Free Points

1

Nexus Coins

[F] 26 743 653

The day's activities had slightly improved his attributes once again, with him gaining a level in his undead form from killing beasts when they changed mountains. He looked at his Free Point for a bit before he put it into Strength.

He had gone back and forth on this, eventually he chose to increase his Strength. With the help of the Dao of Sharpness, he actually had far more Dexterity than he needed to keep a decent ratio. He felt that he could afford a couple of more points into Strength since it was still his main attribute during fights.

Another idea he had was to boost his Wisdom and Intelligence to 100 each before he got ready to evolve, in case any future Class Upgrade had restrictions on either those attributes or that there was a minimum of 100 in all attributes.

But he felt that putting points there was a bit premature. He was leaning toward instant power-ups during this hunt, rather than something that could benefit him down the line. Besides, it wasn't impossible he'd gain some more attributes through new titles or treasures before he reached level 75. The fewer points he needed to put himself into those attributes the better.

Another welcome surprise was that [Nature's Punishment] and [Nature's Barrier] both had evolved from the last battle. He hadn't noticed until now since he had been in his Undead form during the whole day.

That Nature's Punishment had upgraded was the most critical. It had been his final card in every tough fight since he gained the skill, and the power of the wooden hand essentially dictated how strong enemies he could defeat.

He had no idea just what kind of effect the upgraded skill would have since there were no clues, but he sensed that the fractal on his forearm could take in far more energy compared to before, which could only be seen as a good sign.

Each point in attribute also increased the amount of Cosmic Energy he could hold, meaning that he had far more to go around today compared when he first gained the skill. At that time using the skill just once took pretty much all his energy, but by now he used less than half his energy to launch it.

As for [Nature's Barrier], he simply summoned the swirling leaves after throwing a glance at the tent at the opposite side of the building. The continuous consumption of his defensive skill was higher since the upgrade. But the leaves were also far more resplendent, almost lighting up the building with their green luster.

He also saw that the veins on the leaves had changed a bit. They slightly looked like fractals before as well, but it was much clearer now. He still couldn't make anything out from the fractals due to his lacking insight into that field, but he knew that each leaf could block far more force compared to before.

Satisfied with the result he deactivated the skill, his eyes turning to his Cosmos Sack next.

He hadn't properly gone through it since they had been on the move the whole day, but now there was time to properly look it over. He had briefly peeked into it during the day, and he was shocked by the number of things inside since he looted Salvation.

There was no way he would be able to store everything inside if he had only his own sacks, as the sheer quantity of items was just enormous. If he decided to empty the Sack he would be able to create a small hill of healing pills alone for example, and there were thousands and thousands of weapons.

Salvation had been at the 8th place on the Gatherer ladder when he fled the hunt, but his way of getting that high up had been vastly different from himself and Thea. The two of them had only hit top palaces, occasionally lining their pockets with the possessions of other trial takers while traveling between the summits.

Salvation had simply killed and robbed almost a thousand people as a way to increase his Silver Guard, and it was obvious that he'd kept everything they owned as well. But it was also clear that most of the guards were of pretty low power on average, as the quality of the loot was pretty lackluster. Zac sat and went through item after item, but he only found a total of six items that seemed valuable.

He placed them together with the 22 other items he had looted during the hunt, the first of them being the extremely heavy metal ball that was covered in intricate fractals. His plan for them was simply to hand them over to Calrin when he got back for identification and potentially selling off.

Some of them might be a good weapon against the Dominators or the Medhin Emperor, but he was just unable to figure anything out about their method of usage. He'd rather just stash them than accidentally blowing himself up. As for the mountain of other treasures, they were just low-value items that would fill his contribution system back in Port Atwood. Things such as healing- and fasting pills were always in high demand.

The night passed uneventfully, and the two set out at the break of dawn. They once again settled into their usual routine, and the following days they hit one high-value target after another. However, on the second day, something odd happened.

In the distance, the mountains were simply replaced with the blackness of space, and the once endless field of view got abruptly cut short. It came suddenly and without warning, and made Zac and Thea stop in their tracks. D

"It's a battle royale," Zac suddenly muttered as he looked on the newly erected wall.

"A what?" Thea asked with confusion.

"I think the System is reducing the size of the hunt, and it might keep shrinking it over time. We're pretty spread out at the moment, and we haven't really fought anyone in two days. The system wants more struggle, and it forces us into closer proximity," Zac said.

"Figures," Thea only commented with a sigh.

"Well, there's still quite a huge field to search. Even if we walked in a straight line it would take us over a month to pass the whole thing. But I think we should maintain a large distance from the black wall, the System might not give a warning if it decides to reduce the area again," Zac added as he started looking for a new target.

Zac was proven right three days later, as the black wall swallowed up a large group of mountains again. And if the System was looking for more fights the plan worked spectacularly. Both Zac and Thea had been forced to kill a bunch of cultivators each during the past days.

Furthermore, the valleys were flooded with innumerable beasts that seemed to have been pushed out of the black enclosure. It had gotten to the point that he'd even seen a pack of huge rats getting pushed down the large cracks in the ground that ran alongside the mountains due to overcrowding.

There were also constant sounds of battles from the various mountains, and the impacts they caused were getting larger as well as most of the weaker people were quickly getting rooted out. In just three days over ten thousand had been eliminated from the hunt either through leaving voluntarily or getting killed, which was a way faster pace than before.

Zac and Thea were mostly unaccosted by this though. There were very few who could threaten them at the moment, and the mountain peaks there were usually very few people on the mountains they chose. They only picked the summits with the most spectacular palaces that would have the harshest arrays protecting them.

They had a few close calls during the past days, particularly in a palace that had an extremely insidious mix of arrays. Initially, they had just thought it was a combination of a battle array that spawned a bunch of golems and a gravity array, but they were wrong.

There had also been an imperceptible illusion array that only slightly messed with their senses, and Zac only found out when his danger sense blared to life. However, it was too late and he was gored by a sharp spike by one of the golems. Thankfully the warning had allowed him to avoid any lethal damage, and the immense pain helped him break out of the array.

However, the two had generally had a smooth sailing so far. But something was different about the mountain in front of them, making Zac stop in his tracks with a frown. They were just standing at the foot as they had with so many other mountains.

But this time his Luck was in no uncertain terms telling him that he was in danger.