

## The Fall 244

### Chapter 244: Immutable Bulwark

Zac couldn't help being in a great mood as he walked through the winding pathways of the tunnel. He had gotten a slew of power-ups, and even his main weapon had received an evolution. Even better, at the end of the road there was a mountain of treasure waiting for him. Falling into the ravine was starting to turn out all right.

But his mood was quickly getting dampened as he walked. First of all the tunnels felt almost endless, and he started to worry just how long the passages were. Perhaps he wouldn't even reach the inheritance before the time was up. But more importantly, the aura of darkness in the tunnel was slowly increasing, making the air oppressive.

He had no idea what the old Array Spirit had prepared, or whether it even had any control over the situation. But he feared the old spirit was leading him toward the source of the darkness to kill the enemies of his fallen sect. Or perhaps the truth was something completely different.

The words of the old man echoed in his mind, and he had started to form a hypothesis about what happened here. Anzonil had said that everything was ruined by one mistake. Not long ago Ogras told him that countless people in the multiverse had turned to monsters in their pursuit of power, and Zac believed that might have been the case with this place.

They had either created or come in contact with the mysterious aura of darkness and sought to control it. It was undeniable that the darkness made people stronger, but they also turned into raving lunatics when they were infected. The specters had a humanoid form when they attacked him and Thea on the mountain peak. What if they were the former sect-members? Perhaps Anzonil wanted him to kill the specters not out of hatred, but out of mercy.

But it was a moot point since Zac had no method of killing them unless they were susceptible to the Dao of Hardness for some reason. So it was with some trepidation that he stopped when the tunnel once again exited into a large den. This time there was no ocean of rats, but instead a sea of insects that most resembled ants.

They were more uniform in size compared to the rats, and there were four types. The largest was a huge blob of an ant in the middle of the den, and it was easily over fifteen meters across. Judging by the short withered legs Zac suspected it was unable to move and relied on the smaller ones to bring it food.

Surrounding what was clearly the queen were a few elite guards that were around three meters each, each emanating powers close to that of E-Rank. Finally were the common ants, and they came in two sizes; medium and large. The whole scene reminded him of the Ayr Hive back on his island, though the ants in front of him looked far more similar compared to the extremely diverse shapes of Ayr insectoids. But there was one more difference.

These things were obviously infected by the darkness. Frenzied battles were taking place all among the smaller ants, and the large queen was currently feasting on one of the worker ants. The whole hive emitted a type of insanity and chaos that was very different from the cooperation that usually characterized ant species.

Zac briefly wondered if he would have to cut his way through all manner of creepy crawlies to get to the treasure as he prepared himself for battle. But he didn't really mind since his level was still pretty low, and he would be able to quickly gain some more levels this way.

His thirst for power was at an all-time high since his meeting with Inevitability, and he knew there was no time to waste. This time he didn't opt to stay hidden and spectate and instead jumped straight into the fray with his axe at the ready.

Clattering from thousands of agitated ants echoed through the caverns, drowning out all other sounds, but Zac simply ignored it as he started killing ants with breakneck speed with his axe. The gloomy transformation of the area from [Fields of Despair] had already taken place, and [Deathwish] was also activated.

Since he had gained the skills already he was using his axe from the start. He wanted to increase his speed as much as possible on his way to the Inheritance. The ants had thick plating to protect themselves, but the upgraded [Verun's Bite] cut through them like they were paper, and his speed of killing was unprecedented in his undead form.

However, he was a bit disappointed to notice that [Deathwish] wasn't very effective against these beasts. The defense was clearly higher than the offense of the ants, and even though the specters kept appearing around him to reflect the bites they mostly harmlessly hit the chitinous shells.

Zac soon decided to completely abandon the skill since it was just a waste of miasma. Instead, he started work his way around in a circle of the outer area of the cavern. The queen was simply sitting there in the middle, and her bodyguards hadn't moved. Perhaps the queen wasn't even a combat class, but rather a being that solely focused on birthing more ants to protect the hive.

He wanted to kill all these ants first for the experience and ladder placements, and he was worried that if he killed the boss first the other ants would flee. This cavern was different from the last one, it contained tens of small tunnels leading god knows where, and Zac wouldn't be able to block them all to keep his prey inside.

Suddenly his danger sense rang in his mind, but no matter where he looked he couldn't see anything. But a second later an unseen force slammed into his mind, and he couldn't help himself from falling over with a groan. If he was human he would likely have emptied his stomach by now, but instead the miasma in his body was going haywire.

He couldn't see straight, and it was like his body didn't understand the commands he sent. But a few piercing stabs of pain cut straight through the confusion. It was two of the larger ants that had taken the opportunity to attack, and each had bit into his torso with their large pincers.

Black ichor was slowly dripping out of the wounds, making Zac groan in pain. But his almost five hundred Endurance wasn't just for show, and he got to his feet with a roar. The two large ants tried to distance themselves from him but they were quickly bisected by two swings empowered by the Dao of Sharpness.

They were extremely quick, and Zac held nothing back in his attacks so that they wouldn't have time to flee. He didn't have access to [Loamwalker] in his current form so he needed to make sure to quickly kill the speedier targets.

Zac took a few steadying breaths to calm the miasma that was still not fully under control inside his body and looked over at the queen. The air around her shuddered with power, making Zac frown. It had likely shot out some mental attack that briefly rendered him immobile.

Unfortunately, he didn't have access [Mental Fortress] as an undead either, and he could only try to fortify his mind with the help of the Dao of Hardness. One of the insights he got into it was a mental resilience, and it should provide some protection against psychic attacks. But the queen was an E-Grade being and Zac had a feeling that a middle stage Dao Seed wouldn't be enough to completely block its attacks.

He quickly popped a healing pill into his mouth as he kept killing the frenzied ants around him, and he was quickly forming a small hill of corpses. It looked like he couldn't ignore the fat blob as he killed its subjects. He would have to hope that the darkness in the smaller ants would make them crazed enough to keep fighting even after their queen died.

He had lost some of his power due to the four gristly puncture wounds, but it wasn't all bad news. The attack from the queen was the third and final strike he needed to endure to complete his quest for [Immutable bulwark]. Now was as good a time as any to test it out, and he quickly activated the skill as he rushed toward the center of the cave.

A huge Fractal shield that was over two meters tall and four meters wide appeared in front of him as he ran. It had the turquoise color of miasma, and fractals formed some sort of pattern in the center of it. But the thing that truly drew Zac's attention was the huge sinister spikes covering the shield. The skill wasn't purely defensive.

In just a few seconds he had mowed down over a hundred ants from his charge, and his killing efficiency was even better than when using his axe. The speed of killing beasts was still worse compared to the carnage he could unleash when using [Chop], but it was a clear step up from waiting for his enemies to kill themselves from [Deathwish].

Zac reactivated [Deathwish] as a precaution as was approaching the stronger ants and the queen. Since the bodyguards could pierce his body with their pincers they should be able to hurt themselves as well, and perhaps the skill also worked against mental attacks. To his surprise, almost ten specters immediately appeared in front of the shield, and he quickly realized was going on.

There was a synergy between [Deathwish] and [Immutable Bulwark]. He had been worried before about the contradictory nature of his first offensive skill. He was a class that focused on blocking, but his skill required him to get hit to hurt his enemies.

He already knew that [Deathwish] didn't activate when he used his shield, but that changed the moment he activated his new skill. Any ant that tried to bite their way through the fractal shield was immediately attacked by spectral copies of themselves, proving that an attack on his bulwark was counted as an attack on himself.

The only downside was that both the power and energy consumption seemed worse compared to when he used his own body as the punching-board.

Still, this was an enormous upgrade as Zac saw it, and it would allow him to avoid any damage while simply pushing forward with his new fractal bulwark. The enemies would be gored by the spikes if they

didn't dodge quick enough, and if they tried to cut their way through they would be just harming themselves.

Soon he arrived at the encirclement of the larger ants that guarded the queen, and he unhesitantly pushed forward like a runaway train. He even imbued his new defense with the Dao of Hardness as he closed in on the last distance.

But just a few moments before he would slam into the final barrier of ants between himself and the queen another wave of the mental attack hit him. He had already fortified his mind with the Dao of Hardness, but the power in that attack was just massive.

He couldn't stop himself from falling over yet again as miasma was once again going out of control. But the protection of the Dao Seed helped him at least keep his consciousness through the attack, and he quickly placed the shield right above himself for protection. Just a second later he sensed a large stream of energy entering him, proving that at least one of the larger ants had just killed himself on his improvised turtle shell.

He wondered if he would be able to stay beneath his shield while all the ants killed themselves upon it, but the queen soon made herself reminded with another mental blast that shocked Zac's system.

The time between the attacks was far shorter this time, making Zac wonder if proximity was a factor in the attack. In any case, it meant he couldn't stay beneath his shield. The three strikes had drained a large amount of his mental energy, and combined with his Dao usage his head was starting to hurt a bit.

If he kept getting blasted he might fry his brain, and he had a feeling that his Duplicity Core couldn't help him with that. His danger sense was already ringing in his mind, so Zac quickly got on his feet to make a final charge at the queen.

But the moment he got up on his feet he saw an incoming enormous ball of chaotic energies. Zac wanted to move out of the way, but he knew he didn't possess the speed with his current class. He had no choice but to brave it, so he pushed a huge amount of miasma into [Immutable Bulwark] as he imbued it with the Dao of Hardness.

A huge explosion rocked the whole cave and Zac couldn't stop himself from being pushed back over fifty meters. His arms shook from the force of the impact, but he was mostly fine. However, the same couldn't be said of the queen.

A large burn-mark adorned her enormous gut, and the thick shell even had some cracks that leaked blue blood. The attack had completely backfired on her, and Zac wanted to take the opportunity to finish her off.

There was only one thought running through his mind as he once again ran toward the shrieking hive queen; this new skill was right up his alley.