

The Fall 252

Chapter 252: Hunter's Paradise

Zac wasn't annoyed by the ruckus in the forest. If the whole hunting ground was like this it would drown out the sounds of battle, which would allow Zac to act more freely without the risk of drawing the attention from the Dominators.

Zac took out his axe and for the first time in a while summoned the oversized edge of [Chop]. As he suspected the edge had changed slightly to accommodate the new form of his axe. After testing the sharpness with his finger and on a few rocks he was happy to see that the edge was far sharper compared to before.

His skill had no problem adapting to the increased quality of the axe, making him wonder if there was any limit to how strong [Chop] could become. The skill wasn't upgradeable unlike most of his other ones, and he had worried about what he would do about it. But perhaps there was no need to worry. He only needed to upgrade his axe and the skill would follow suit.

He did however notice that the energy consumption had drastically increased to accommodate the increased power of the fractal edge. Luckily his energy reserves had gained a huge boost lately, allowing him to use the skill even in prolonged battles.

Zac was eager to both gain points and to properly test the might of his new axe and he wasted no time to unleash a storm of violence at the wildlife in the valleys. He flashed back and forth between the packs with [Loamwalker], and his fractal edges were half-moons of death as they effortlessly bisected animals by the dozen with every swing.

There was no contest, his speed of killing was far superior in his human form, and both points and Nexus Coins kept streaming in. Unfortunately, the monsters weren't very strong here and he was hit with the same reduction in rewarded energy as he got when killing Barghest nowadays.

But he wouldn't stop just because of that, and as he kept killing his way toward the next mountain he also started performing various tests with his new Daos. He found that the improved [Chop] was almost as lethal as when he imbued the edge with the Dao of Sharpness before his axe upgraded, and when he imbued the upgraded edge it emitted a terrifying aura, like it would almost cut space itself.

He also found that he could imbue his edge with the Dao of Hardness without a problem, though the effect seemed quite limited. Perhaps it would be good when hitting things that would harm his axe otherwise. The Dao of Sanctuary couldn't be infused though, but Zac wasn't surprised by that.

He also summoned [Nature's Barrier] and he was happy to see that he finally found a use for his new Dao. The skill had a pretty surprising change when it was infused with the Dao of Sanctuary. Zac had always been able to change the size of the area the swirling leaves protected to a certain degree, but after he infused it he could almost extend the area by almost ten times compared to before.

Even better, as the size increased the number of leaves increased as well, so the actual strength of the barrier didn't decrease with the increased area protected. However, such a large sphere of protection consumed a huge amount of cosmic energy, so Zac quickly removed his Dao before he was drained.

He would only be able to keep that shield going for a minute tops before completely running out of energy. But that was more than enough if he needed to protect a large group from some incoming threat until it could be neutralized.

The Dao of Hardness worked as well, and it turned the leaves slightly wooden from their earlier glistening emerald. The defensive properties were clearly improved though, but he felt it wasn't quite up to the level of the Dao of Trees. But the skill itself had also been given a huge upgrade with the help of his massive Endurance, and he felt that he wouldn't be completely helpless against Inevitability's chains any longer.

All in all, he had a good all-round upgrade in the cavern, where even his offensive power had taken a good leap thanks to upgrading [Verun's Bite], so Zac had some newfound confidence as he kept moving through the sea of beasts toward the next mountain.

He wasn't as interested in looting the summits any longer and was more interested in finding stronger beasts to fight. But even more importantly he wanted to find one of the five thousand remaining hunters so that he could get an update on what was going on.

The first mountain seemed completely deserted, and he found that the buildings close to the foot had all been looted. Since time was limited he opted to keep going toward the next one, but when he did he suddenly noticed a startling change.

It seemed that the System had somehow arranged things so that the beasts were getting stronger and provided more points when he proceeded toward the core of the hunt. Zac looked toward the core area with a frown, unsure of what to do. The density of the beasts around him was just crazy, but where he was they were pretty weak and provided very little Nexus Coins and Cosmic Energy.

He already had accepted that he wouldn't be able to get to level 75 through the hunt rewards, but he would at least be able to gain at least another level if he moved further toward the core and fought the stronger beasts instead.

He was also more likely to find stronger cultivators further in, which might help him accomplish a task that he had almost forgotten. He needed more alliances back on earth. Partly for Calrin to expand their business, but also to move across the world to close the incursions.

He didn't know how long the inheritances would take, but according to Ogras they usually took just a few hours tops. That meant that he would be out closing incursions in less than a week. There would be a need for infrastructure to be quickly put in place so that he wasted no time traveling between the incursions.

In the end, Zac chose to move further toward the core of the remaining area, creating huge swathes of deaths wherever he went. But the gaps were quickly filled with more beasts swarming to feast on the corpses.

He passed three mountains by as he headed further toward the core, doing a quick inspection for signs of any hunters. But it seemed the outer rim was pretty abandoned, and all the signs of activity were pretty old. But as he approached the fourth mountain he found a clue.

He noticed the grass on a large field to be glistening with blood thanks to the position of the sun, and even the ground was wet. However, there was not a single corpse to be found, meaning the battleground had been cleaned to hide the activity. This strongly indicated some cultivators had been grinding points and levels here recently and then tried to hide it.

Zac quickly scoured the area for any clues, but there was not much to go by. Finally, he chose to stalk the foot of the mountain, hoping to find the person's hideout. He caught a lucky break after twenty minutes as he noticed a man stealthily moving toward a building in the distance. Zac didn't approach though, instead opting to check it out from the distance.

The interiors were completely shrouded in darkness, but Zac already knew his target was inside unless there were hidden exits. However, he was hesitating whether he should enter or just shout from outside. If he entered he would need to break through the array protecting the building, which might give the person inside time to flee or crush his token.

But shouting from the outside would warn the occupant, and with Zac's ladder positions he would be a fool not to flee. In the end, Zac opted for the brute force tactic, and with a flash he slammed right into the array at the entrance with his movement skill.

He was surprised to find himself completely immobilized the moment he passed through the entrance. It was a restriction array, and he hadn't expected such a strong one to be placed down here so close to the foot of the mountain. Zac belatedly realized this was likely the reason this hunter chose this place as a hideout.

A sudden sense of danger in his mind was all the warning Zac got before a sword swung with the intent to pierce his throat with immense speed. However, while Zac was unable to move he could still rouse his Dao Seeds, and between 642 Endurance and the Dao of Hardness the stab barely drew blood.

The next moment Zac broke the array by force and gripped the shocked man by his neck with one hand as he snatched the token with his other. It had been hanging by the man's neck, easily accessible in case he needed to retreat quickly.

"I have some questions," Zac said to the horrified man.

Ten minutes later Zac descended from the mountain once again with a crude map in his hands. It was something John, the man from earlier, had drawn. It detailed the surrounding area of five mountains in each direction, mainly with markers where other cultivators resided and good hiding spots.

With the drastic increase in monsters a shift had taken place on the surface while Zac was stuck down below. There were very few battles now between cultivators, at least in the outer rim. The people here had simply staked out a small area for themselves and used the remaining time to farm the beasts below as hard as they could.

These people had no chance of gaining any rewards from the ladders, but the great density of evenly powered monsters had turned the zone to a leveling paradise. They had already gathered a decent chunk of wealth and felt no need to risk their lives to explore any further.

These people on the outer rim were mainly between levels 35 to 40, and killing beasts here was extremely beneficial as long as they didn't get overrun. And Zac was surprised to note that the levels on earth's power ladder had made a great leap.

Rank

Name

Level

1

Super Brother-Man

62

2

Salvation

58

3

Enigma

55

4

Thwonkin' Billy

54

5

Thea Marshall

54

6

Joker

54

7

Silverfox

53

8

Daoist Chosui

53

9

Guru Anaad Phakiwar

52

10

Thomas Fischer

52

...

100

Edmund

46

His lead wasn't as immense anymore, with everyone in the top twenty having passed level 50. Even though Salvation had been kicked out of the hunt pretty early he hadn't been idle, and he was now level 58, just five levels behind himself. Thea hadn't had as impressive a performance for some reason, and she was overtaken by not one but two people.

Zac was a bit surprised since he knew just how efficient in hunting beasts she was. With the conditions as they were, Zac would have thought that Thea would not only keep up with Salvation but possibly even pass him on the ladder.

His friend the Abbot had been relegated down to the 37th position, but he was surprised to see a new familiar face at the top ten. It looked like Thomas Fisher must have somehow made a huge improvement to reach so far so quickly, since he wasn't even on the ladder before the hunt.

To reach the top 100 you needed to be at least level 46 now. He hadn't thought about it before, but he was relieved to see that he wasn't listed twice. That would have raised some questions he did not want to answer.

However, according to John things were likely not as calm closer to the core of the hunt. He had occasionally heard sounds of battle carrying all the way over here, most notably a massive battle taking place three days ago. John figured it was the fight that ended with Repubat Medhin disappearing from the ladder, and Zac was inclined to agree.

There had been another large battle happening just a few hours before Zac arrived as well, though John was unsure who that was between since no one disappeared from the ladder at that time. It had only lasted for less than thirty seconds though, so John thought it was a lopsided one.

But mostly there was a desperate fight for the top hundred in the gatherer ladder since that one would give out titles. Just being able to kill one or two cultivators could increase one's gathered wealth manifold, skyrocketing them up on the ladder. It was risky, but many of those remaining were willing to take that risk.

After Zac had found everything he needed he had crushed the token of John and sent him back to Earth. He didn't feel the need to steal his treasure as well since he was almost dead last in the gatherer ladder. But Zac also wouldn't let him stay here since he had tried to kill him.

There was one danger for everyone though, not just those staying closer to the core. There were roving squads of Medhin warriors that even assaulted the outer rims in search of treasure. The Medhin Emperor was truly insatiable and had ordered his soldiers to gather everything from animal parts to looting weaker cultivators to increase his wealth.

Zac snorted when he thought about the image of the Medhin Emperor seeing himself get pushed down to 2nd spot again, being unable to regain his position. The emperor was likely even scouring the trial ground for him. But Zac had no intention of meeting that old monster.

He was simply content to hunt the stronger beasts and find cultivators from Earth.