

## The Fall 263

### Chapter 263: Man's Best Friend

Warning bells were going off in Zac's mind and he quickly slammed his axe into the ground right next by the stump of Ylvas' leg. [Verun's Bite] sucked in a bit more E-Grade blood from the pool that had formed beneath it making the fractal on the handle blaze in crimson red, allowing Zac to unleash his final trump card. He squeezed some of his remaining Cosmic Energy into his axe, and the enormous form of Verun appeared.

The Tool Spirit was able to localize the threat as if by instinct, and it immediately pounced to the left and swiped its large claws seemingly into the air. A groan could be heard as a young man appeared out of nowhere, sinister energies swirling around his hands. It almost looked like stars were hovering around them, and the skill reminded Zac of Abby's large eye.

A large gash stretched across the man's whole upper body from Verun's surprise attack. He barely had time to land before the enormous beast bit at him with almost impossible speed. The primordial beast ruthlessly swung his head back and forth in an effort to rip his prey to shreds, blood cascaded all over the area. Unfortunately, Zac sensed no incoming Cosmic Energy, indicating that the man was still alive.

The assassin had been taken by surprise by the sudden appearance, but he managed to avoid any fatal injuries even when he was in the maw of the tool spirit. A purple light suddenly shone through the teeth of Verun, and it grew in intensity until it was almost blinding in just a second.

The next moment the light quickly disappeared, before a huge explosion took place inside Verun's maw. The Tool Spirit's semi-corporeal form was completely obliterated, and Zac was forced a few steps back from the intense energies from the explosion.

Worry filled his heart when he saw Verun's shape fall apart, but he soon breathed out in relief as he sensed the spirit returning to the axe, while the red fractal dimmed down. It only sent him a sense of frustration that it had failed, and that it needed to rest again.

The assassin had managed to stave off Verun, but he was in a pitiful state. Grisly wounds covered his whole body, especially around his stomach where Verun had chomped down with its massive teeth. Zac could see his innards and a few wounds through the huge wounds, and he was surprised the assassin could even stand up from how he looked.

However, Zac wasn't completely relieved even though his body was in disrepair. The man's aura was completely unstable as it fluctuated around him, but the energy the guy emitted was no joke. His eyes were also sharp as he glared at Zac, indicating he hadn't completely lost his fighting strength. Judging by the energy fluctuations and clothes from the man in front of them Zac knew this could only be one person.

"Vasidas," Ylvas growled as he aimed his sword at him, arduously getting back on his leg.

However, Zac knew that it was just empty bluster. The old champion's body was completely wrung out from his last attacks, and he was only conscious by sheer will-power. If he squeezed out any more life-force to attack, he would either turn into a cripple or die.

The situation was the worst-case scenario. He knew there was a decent risk of Vasidas doing this, and it was one of the reasons he had tried to end the fight as quickly as possible. He had also entered the weakened state since the boost from [Hatchetman's Rage] had run out.

But he knew he couldn't show weakness at this juncture, and resolutely gripped his axe while his other hand moved toward his Cosmos Sack. He didn't have some secret weapon there, but his mind went to the Spiritual Pill he found on the Alchemist's Mountain.

Just a whiff from the vapors accumulated in the cauldron had not only restored his energy and given him a level, it had also revived him out of his weakened state. He wasn't sure what would happen if he ingested the pill in his current situation, but he didn't really have many other alternatives if the man in front of him tried something.

"Well played, I did not see that coming. Owning a weapon with a spiritual form, impressive," the man panted before looking down at his wretched appearance. "I guess today's game is over. But I have a feeling we will see each other again."

"Where's Thea?" Zac said with a frown while he held his axe at the ready.

It sounded like Vasidas would give up since his sneak attack failed, but Zac wouldn't take his word for it.

"Ms. Marshall is having tea over in the gazebo on the other side of the summit," Vasidas said. "I always uphold my promises."

"Today is my loss, but The Great Redeemer's machinations are unavoidable," the voice of Vasidas echoed across the summit, drawing glares from the Berum forces who stood in the distance.

Zac hesitated for a second, but in the end, he chose to not force a battle or try a sneak attack. Killing this man wasn't his main goal, and it had a high risk of back-firing. Zac knew he had made the right decision, when Vasidas just slowly faded into nothingness, both his aura and body suddenly gone.

"I don't believe that," Ylvas said with a sigh, plopping down on the ground. "Fate is everchanging."

"Are you okay by yourself?" Zac asked, eager to head in the direction that Vasidas indicated.

"Go, find your lass. My men will keep me safe," Ylvas said as he popped another healing pill.

The moment that Vasidas left, the few remaining Medhin warriors heedlessly fled down the mountain, abandoning any thought of resistance. Of the Berum warriors, only a handful remained as well, most having died by the Emperor's final attack.

Everyone sported heavy wounds, but they formed a three-layer thick shield wall around Ylvas, allowing their leader to heal up. Zac wasn't sure they would really amount to much if Vasidas came back, but he needed to get going and didn't say anything. As Zac left Ylvas side the soldiers all also wordlessly bowed in his direction, showing their thanks for his part in the war.

"Do you know if Billy okay?" Zac asked one of the guards surrounding Ylvas before he left.

"The large one? He fell asleep some ways down the mountain, a few people are guarding him," the man said. "That smash was amazing."

Zac nodded in relief before he started running over toward the ruins of the summit palace. He was about to enter it, but he stopped himself the last moment to pop one of his top-grade healing pills in his mouth. He also took out both a Divine Crystal and an E-Grade Nexus Crystal to both heal and restore himself as quickly as possible.

He was extremely wrung out, and if he wasn't careful he'd turn into his Draugr-form again, which might lead to untold problems. He also was in no condition to assault a summit array. The frenzied strikes of the emperor's spear-world had turned the palace into ruins, but Zac didn't dare bet his life that it had also destroyed the protective arrays surrounding it.

It was only twenty minutes later he felt strong enough to go ahead. During that time there hadn't been any real changes on the summit. The squads that had veered to the sides to intercept any potential backup had rushed up the mountain after hearing the results of the battle, and they had taken over the task of protecting Ylvas.

A few even stood vigil over Zac while he recuperated, though it wasn't really necessary. While he was spent, it was not to the same degree as when he fought Salvation. The emperor had been far stronger, but Zac had gained a huge upgrade in both survivability and Cosmic Energy reserves due to his frantic leveling while in his Draugr-form.

He was still far from top shape as he got back to his feet, but Zac felt it should be enough to not get blasted by the array. He took a few steps forward and was immediately inundated in scorching flames. With his high constitution however, it only stung a bit, and he made his way through in just a few seconds.

Soon enough he found the place Vasidas referred to, hidden beyond the rubble at the far end of the palace, overlooking the mountain. Standing there was a small gazebo that was undamaged from Nenotheop's crazed onslaught, likely saved by the fact that it was out of range of the enormous fractal. And sitting there was the familiar face craning her neck to look over the rubble.

"You're okay!" Thea said with wide eyes when she spotted Zac. "I couldn't see the battle due to the palace, apart from that huge fractal toward the end. And was that Billy's head I spotted ten meters in the air?"

Zac smiled as he walked over, a great sense of relief filling his heart.

"Yeah it was Billy, he came to help as well. That guy can really club things," Zac said as he gazed at Thea. "I was worried about you."

Thea's mouth curved upward in a smile for a second, before her eye's turned downcast and she looked down.

"Sorry I caused so much trouble for you," she sighed. "I got too greedy and caused all these problems."

"It's okay. You saved my life with that protective skill from Inevitability. This was the least I could do," Zac answered as he walked inside the gazebo. "What's going on, are you trapped somehow?"

It was a bit curious. The fight ended over twenty minutes ago, but Thea still sat rooted here instead of fleeing or heading over to see what was going on.

"It's these chains," Thea muttered as she swung her leg.

Only now did Zac notice that her right leg was cuffed, and a chain was attached to a fixture in the ground. However, the chain wasn't very thick, and Thea should have no problem ripping it apart even though her main attribute was Dexterity.

"This thing?" Zac said with some confusion as he leaned closer. "Can't you break it?"

"It's some sort of treasure. It saps me of all my energy. The moment I gather any Cosmic Energy the manacle sucks it out and it gets released into the ground by the chain," Thea sighed. "I can't summon any of my strength, it feels like I'm back before the integration."

Now that Zac gave it a proper look it reminded him a bit of the large chains down in the ravine, those that Anzonil once had used in an effort to suppress his disciple. However, these were a much weaker version. Zac curiously looked at it and after a brief hesitation touched the chain with his hand, but he felt nothing. It was the same with the manacle itself, and after prodding about for a minute he managed to open them up.

There wasn't a lock holding the thing in place, but the clasp was tough to unclasp. It likely required at least 100 strength to open, which was impossible for a prisoner in a weakened state. It was a pretty ingenious design and having such a thing would perhaps be very convenient in the future.

"Can I take this?" Zac asked as he looked up, but he was startled when he saw Thea's expression.

Her face was flushed, and she glared at him with enraged eyes.

"Had enough yet?" she wheezed out through grit teeth.

"Wha-" Zac tried to ask but stopped himself as his eyes widened.

He finally realized that he had been too engrossed with the design of the chain, and his head had been sandwiched between her knees while he fiddled with the clasp for almost a minute. Zac immediately jumped a few steps away and coughed in embarrassment.

"You should absorb some energy, but we can't stay long," Zac said, completely glossing over the issue.

"The emperor is dead and Vasidas is badly wounded, and who knows, the Dominators might be on their way. It seems they all serve the same person, and they might have an alliance."

"What? Who?" Thea said with confusion, her curiosity overcoming her anger.

"The Great Redeemer," Zac said with a sigh.

"Salvation's master? How is that possible?" Thea said skeptically.

"I am not sure about all the details yet, but it doesn't look good for either Berum or Earth to be honest," Zac said with a shake of his head. "Let's walk as we talk."

The two started heading back toward Ylvas, and Zac explained what he learned about The Great Redeemer from the old champion, adding in his own speculations as he went. They also told each other what they had been up to since they got separated, though Zac glossed over some parts about his situation that needed to be kept secret.

He was shocked to find out about the defensive skill she used. Its effect was truly amazing. When she had lit up like a Christmas tree as they fell down the cliff, she had activated a teleportation skill. But that skill not only teleported her away, but it also gave an almost absolute defense until she was whisked away as well.

Using the skill had its clear drawbacks though. It took some time to charge up the teleportation, and the cost of the skill was something far more expensive than Cosmic Energy. It cost levels to use, which explained why she hadn't improved much while he was stuck in the tunnels. Thea herself wasn't sure exactly how it worked, but her current guess was that the more damage the skill blocked while the teleportation charged up, the higher the cost would be.

The two kept talking and almost forgot that they just had survived a true life-and-death situation. They were dragged out of their bubble from heavy steps quickly approaching them. Zac looked up to see an almost mummified Billy running over with a smile that reached from ear to ear.

"Thea! Billy missed you!"