

Chapter 269: Four Gates

"You shouldn't slander others little Acorn," the old man sighed with disappointment. "You know those days are long behind me. And wildly exaggerated."

"Then why is that pouch belonging to that guard earlier tied around your waist?" the younger Sky Gnome said with a scathing glare.

"You! You just want the Lord to focus on my fingers so that he won't notice you undervaluing the goodies!" the old man angrily spat as he quickly hid the pouch in an inner pocket of his robe.

Zac's brows rose, especially when Calrin did nothing to correct the two.

"Well, to be a successful thief you need to be able to discern what's valuable and what to discard, no?" Calrin said with a cough after seeing Zac's glare. "But he's all retired now. And you have me to oversee everything so you don't need to worry about a thing."

Zac groaned in response, hating that he couldn't get a second opinion anywhere as things stood. But he knew that even if Calrin skimmed a bit money it wouldn't be too bad. Furthermore, since he owned a sizeable share of the Consortia it would still come back into his pocket in the end.

"The goal here is essentially to identify the treasures I gathered and then differentiate the loot into three categories," Zac explained. "The first category is the valuable and essential treasures. I'll keep those myself and personally hand them out to our elites if needed.

"The second is is for items to add to our Merit Exchange. We are working against the clock so things that can help empower our forces and provide speedy gains. The final category would be things that might be valuable but aren't of use to Port Atwood. These items would be sold through the Consortia," Zac finished.

The Sky Gnomes eagerly nodded at the instructions, each of them almost looking possessed by greedy demons. Zac sighed and started taking things out. He started with the items he was the most curious about.

A glass bottle suddenly appeared in Zac's hand and the alchemist's furnace appeared on the ground in front of them. The pill was the thing he was most curious about, and the Cauldron might help give some clues to its origins. Just a waft of its residual vapors had allowed him to gain a level, so he couldn't imagine the efficacy of the pill itself.

"This is a pill with spirituality, which I found in this cauldron. When I opened the cauldron a cloud was released, and the energy it contained both gave me a level and instantly healed me," Zac said as he handed over the bottle. "Can you identify the pill?"

One of the Sky Gnomes quickly took out a huge book, and when he opened it Zac saw it was filled with pictures of pills along with descriptions alongside it. However, the old thief only took a glance at it before he spoke up.

"It's a [Four Gates Pill], it's a mid-tier E-Grade pill," he said, not without some longing. "It's the first time I hear of one with spirituality though. The cauldron is just a Decent E-Grade cauldron. Perhaps worth 70 Million"

"What's the purpose of the pill?" Zac asked.

"It harnesses the four elements to break open Nodes," Gemidir succinctly explained. "It would likely have an additional effect now that it has spirituality."

"Four elements?" Zac repeated before he quickly took out the three spirit herbs he looted from the hidden garden. "Do you think these are the ingredients used?"

"[Blistering Ice Bamboo], [Phoenix Peppers] and [Rock Ginseng], and their ages are excellent," another of the Gnomes exclaimed.

"You're only missing [Sky reed] and you would have all four main components to create the pill," the old man added.

"I found these three growing in a secluded spot, along with a broken paddy," Zac explained. "I looted both the special soil and all the plants. Would we be able to keep growing these herbs?"

"Certainly," the Sky Gnome who recognized the herbs said without hesitation. "However, it takes over 50 years to grow these herbs to maturity without skilled farmers who can shorten that duration, and that's only to get their minimum efficacy. For the herbs to contain this much energy you would need to wait a few hundred years, even with a skilled farmer."

Zac sighed in disappointment. Fifty years might not be very long for a force in the multiverse, but it was for Zac who was strapped for time.

"See if you can buy aged [Sky Reed] then," Zac said. "How long would it take for us to train an alchemist that could concoct [Four-Gate] pills?"

"If you want those pills to use, might I suggest an alternative method?" Calrin said.

"What's that?" Zac asked.

"Trade the herbs for finished pills," Calrin said.

"People would do that?" Zac asked skeptically.

"It's pretty common among Alchemists," Calrin explained. "Another way for them to enrich themselves. They give ratios, for example 4 sets of herbs for 2 pills. If they manage to create the 2 pills in less than 4 sets they can pocket the difference as profit. But with the age of these herbs, we should be able to get pretty good ratios."

Zac slowly nodded.

"Does anything else than the ratios matter?" Zac asked.

He had encountered a few pills by now, but most of them were simple healing pills that generally used life-attuned energy or roused the body's own restorative powers. But things like cultivation pills were still not something he was very knowledgeable about.

“The skill of the alchemist,” Gemidir said. “Different grades of the pills have differing effects.”

Pills used the same grading system as Daos, depending on how well the pills concocted. So the same pill could be anything from Low-Grade to Peak-Grade, and the effect could vastly differ. It turned out that a low-grade pill wasn’t even guaranteed to open one node, whereas a Peak-grade [Four gates Pill] actually guaranteed 1 node and gave a high chance of a second.

“I’ll hold onto these for now,” Zac said.

The herbs he had possessed an extraordinary age, and he wasn’t sure he wanted to send them over to some unknown alchemist that might pocket the aged herbs and concoct using ordinary ones. He did want the pills since his people would start reaching E-Grade within a few years at most, and having these would expedite the progress of his forces. But he didn’t want to waste this treasure.

Hopefully, he could nurture or get to know a skilled Alchemist that he could trust with his herbs instead of sending them out through the mercantile system. Meanwhile, they could start growing the four herbs on the island.

Since he had decided what to do with the herbs he took out the next treasure. It was a pity the cauldron wasn’t anything special, but it would make a nice gift for the first proper Alchemist his force nurtured. Next, the huge metal ball that Zac found on his first summit appeared and he put it down on the ground with a heavy thump.

“A spiritual ship,” Calrin said with interest. “Lowest grade, but it should still be worth quite a bit.”

“What? This thing?” Zac asked with surprise.

A spiritual ship had been something he had wanted ever since he learned about their existence from Ogras. That’s why he wanted to upgrade the Shipyard so badly. Unfortunately, when he had asked Rahm about it he had simply tabled the matter until Zac had evolved.

Unfortunately, it would take the Sky Gnomes some time to figure out how to activate it from its current compressed state, so Zac would have to curb his enthusiasm and postpone any joyrides. Instead they kept going through the immense wealth in Zac’s pouch with rapid speed, and they hadn’t even gone through a tenth after an hour.

But Zac suddenly stopped and opened up a menu with a frown.

“What’s wrong?” Calrin asked.

“A new teleporter just became public,” Zac said with surprise.

“A public teleporter? With all the things that are happening on this planet?” Calrin muttered. “Are they suicidal?”

“Or desperate,” Zac ventured. “The place is called Everwood Refuge, and it’s not a place I have heard of before.”

“Are you going?” Calrin asked.

Zac hesitated for a few seconds before he shook his head.

“Not at the moment. The situation is unclear and I have so many things on my plate as it is,” Zac said, and resumed taking out treasure after treasure.

But it only took fifteen minutes until they were once again interrupted, this time by Kenzie jogging over to his courtyard. Zac had already erected multiple layers of arrays to hide the things inside, so she was forced to wave her arms to get his attention.

Zac started walking toward her, but after a brief hesitation ran back and put back all the treasures into one of his Cosmos Sacks first. He wasn't exactly confident in leaving so much wealth in front of four Sky Gnomes. They might turn crazy by greed and do something stupid, and he didn't want any trouble with his cooperation.

“What's going on?” Zac said after he exited the shield.

“We have visitors,” Kenzie said, “From Westfort.”

“Thea's people?” Zac said with surprise. “What do they want?”

He hadn't expected someone to come over already, though it was technically possible for his trusted allies to come at any time. They had already agreed that he would come to Westfort in two days to take back his batch of treasures and also peruse the Library.

“Yes, they are requesting assistance. Apparently a town is being attacked by an Incursion, and the Marshalls have some sort of agreement with them,” she explained.

“Tell Ogras and Joanna. I will meet this man at the teleporter,” Zac said as he returned back inside the arrays.

“We will have to take a break for now,” Zac said, much to the disappointment of the Sky Gnomes. “A settlement is under attack from an Incursion. I will go check things out.”

“Of course,” Calrin nodded. “But before you go. I would like to request some body-guards for my men. I want to immediately send representatives to the new towns in our network.”

“Right now?” Zac said with a frown. “We have a lot of things to do.”

“The subject wasn't brought up at the meeting, but we are currently sitting on a mountain of gear crafted from the beast waves being unused. From what I gather this world is heading for its final battles that will decide whether you will break free from the invaders or become yet another conquered baby world,” Calrin started.

“This is the optimal opportunity to make some money. But it will also help strengthen you humans while simultaneously bolstering the somewhat marred image of Port Atwood,” Calrin said.

“Fine. Take ten demons and ten Valkyries,” Zac nodded before he disappeared.

Just a minute later he arrived at the teleporter, seeing a middle-aged man curiously looking around. But the moment he saw Zac approach his eyes widened a bit and he straightened his back.

“I assume you're the representative from Westfort?” Zac asked as he appeared in front of him.

"It's an honor, Lord Atwood," the man said with a bow. "I am Roland Marshal, and I will be the ambassador of Westfort, with your blessing of course."

"Nice to meet you," Zac simply said with a nod.

"I was planning on introducing myself at your arrival in two days, but time waits for no man. You should have no doubt seen the new public town on the teleportation list. It is one of the major Ishiate towns, and they are currently being besieged by their neighboring Incursion," Roland explained.

"The Marshall forces are currently preparing, but rearranging our forces will take some time," the ambassador continued after checking his watch. "We sent a few scouts through the teleporter first, and there were no signs of either Dominators or Salvation as of eight minutes ago."

Zac nodded, understanding the man's implication. The town would perhaps fall before The Marshal Clan could muster its forces.

"I will join as well. I planned to settle a few matters before attacking the Incursions, but I guess we can't wait for this one," Zac said. "Is Thea coming as well?"

"Exactly, time is of the essence," Roland said with a nod. "Unfortunately my niece was forced to put out a few fires as soon as she got back, so she will not be joining you. But she will be done with her quests by the time you arrive at Westfort."

Zac nodded, slightly disappointed. Having a good ally by one's side drastically increased safety.

"I am heading back for now, but with your permission, I would like to build a small embassy on your island where I and a small staff would handle any matters that require the cooperation of our two forces. I understand you had a very successful relationship with my niece during the hunt, and my wish is for that relationship to turn into a strong bond between our two families," Roland continued.

Zac frowned a bit at the very ambiguous wording, but he had no interest in trying to correct the man. He could understand if the marshalls wanted to forge an alliance the old-school way between their two forces. With him and Thea at the helm, there would be no resisting them.

"That's fine. You can talk with Adran later to settle those types of matters later," he nodded. "He's the administrator in charge of most city planning."

"Excellent. It was a pleasure meeting you," Roland said with another bow before he walked over to the teleporter and was gone with a flash.

Since he had already decided to fight he was eager to get going, but he still decided to wait for Ogras to have someone to watch his back. And it took less than a minute to arrive, and to his surprise he was accompanied by Calrin, who was completely decked in defensive gear.

"Strike while the iron is hot," the gnome simply muttered as an explanation to Zac's questioning glance.

"Fine, let's go. Some incursion is attacking, but it shouldn't be one of the top-grade ones. We'll keep them at bay until reinforcements arrive. And Ogras... Don't steal the boss kill this time, okay?" Zac said as he threw a glance at the demon.

"Oh, heard about that one, did you?" Ogras said with a smile.

“I did, Billy was very upset. But I promised you would personally go there and apologize and bring a gift,”
Zac said drawing a disbelieving look from the demon.