

The Fall 313

Chapter 313: The Belly of the Beast

Zac's face soured when he heard that he would have to enter the belly of the beast if he wanted to evolve his skill. His initial plan was to reach level 75 and get his two new skills before assaulting Salvation, but now it looked like that idea was impossible to achieve.

He had already discarded the idea of felling one of the so-called Treefathers. For one they weren't as tall as the Redwood according to the report he was holding in his hand. They rather grew wide whereas the Redwood grew tall. And he didn't feel right about essentially killing the representation of the Ishiate's ancestors.

Still, there was some hesitation in his mind until Ogras suddenly motioned him to the side and erected one of the small array disks that Zac brought from the hunt. It isolated the small area around them, and Ogras' shadows did the rest to completely obscure the two.

"What do you need such a high tree for? You never mentioned anything like this," Ogras said. "I thought we were here for rooting out the spies and dragging out some compensation of these fools."

"Compensation?" Zac blurted out with raised brows.

He never even considered such a thing and had simply wanted to fix an issue that the main branch of the Marshall clan perhaps wasn't even aware of. To demand compensation at this juncture seemed a surefire way to sour the relationship with the Marshall clan which felt especially ill-timed now that he had just taken in another group of invaders.

"Don't go overboard. I'm sure your stock around here isn't the best since your stunt at the Auction," Zac sighed. "And I need the tree for my class."

"You need an enormous tree for your class..?" Ogras repeated with a blank face. "Never heard anything like it. Does it need to be 500 meters? The ones I spotted in the Mystic Realm weren't that tall, but still pretty huge."

"It's 500 meters minimum," Zac said with a shake of his head.

"So what are you thinking? Do you want to assault this Salvation guy immediately?" Ogras probed.

Zac threw a look at the intelligence officers around them. They were clearly curious about what was going on inside the portable array, but they all kept a respectful distance.

"I think it would be for the best. I don't have any powerups coming up I think, apart from a few improvements of my Dao. My other skill quest won't be finished in the short run as well," Zac said.

Ogras thoughtfully mulled over the information, before he nodded.

"Might as well. But I don't think our current lineup will be very useful against that person. He might seem to have a huge army on the surface, but in reality, he is only one entity from how you described him. There are no elites and no generals, just Salvation and his puppets. Bringing a bunch of weaklings will only slow us down." Ogras said.

"Us?" Zac asked with a raised brow, ignoring the comment of the others being weak. Why was the demon so interested in heading into a heated battle?

"As I mentioned I got a few goodies as compensation for the forced fusion with this shadowbastard. I think fighting Salvation with his odd class might be beneficial for me. I have never heard of anything like it before, it's even more mysterious than your class," he said.

"So what do you propose?" Zac asked.

"Well, others can't enter his little kingdom without being spotted, but that doesn't necessarily include us," Ogras said. "I say we sneak inside, cut down a tree, and kill the guy when he comes to investigate. The others could use the break to consolidate their gains. Many should be able to gain or upgrade a Dao seed from the recent battles."

Zac nodded in agreement. He even felt that a few of his own Dao Seeds had improved even though the massive gains he just received from the Inheritance. The most notable was Sharpness, the Dao Seed that he used the most since gaining it. He was even considering using one of his remaining Dao Treasures to push it one step further before heading to the Cradle of God.

"Do you need to prepare anything before we go?" Zac asked, tacitly agreeing with Ogras' plan.

"I just need a few hours in Port Atwood to make sure my shadows are fed and stable," Ogras said after some consideration. "She gets a bit agitated otherwise."

"Great," Zac nodded. "We'll head back after this. I will try to improve a Dao seed to at least get a small boost before we fight Salvation. That guy is the strongest person I've met considering his level."

"Which is what makes him so intriguing. Now for the next issue," Ogras said with a malicious smile as he turned off the Array and dispersed the obscuring shadows.

"Don't do anything crazy," Zac said with some helplessness.

"When have I ever?" Ogras answered, throwing Zac a youthful smile as shadows flooded the room.

Things took a pretty nasty turn from there, with Ogras essentially taking the entire building, including Roland, hostages until a young man was brought in front of them. He was called Henry Marshall, named after the current patriarch, and his ambition matched his name.

He wasn't part of the main branch though, and was rather part of a distant branch. Before the integration, he had barely been considered part of the clan. But since the world changed he had been allowed into the fold, where he had been desperate to prove himself to improve his lot.

He had already been suspected of cooperating with the I'Rallashar, the humanoid clan that just ambushed them, giving intelligence in return for cultivation resources. After hearing that Zac's group was ambushed he was immediately captured and brought over by the chief of the Marshall Intelligence Bureau, a thin and unassuming old man named Charles.

A cursory search of Henry's home was all that was needed to find ample evidence of his culpability.

"So, what punishment will this little guy get?" Ogras sneered as he looked down at the quivering man on the ground.

Charles simply pointed at the forehead of what could be considered his distant nephew, and the next moment a hole appeared that immediately started to leak blood and brain matter. The attack was silent and deadly, and even Ogras seemed a bit surprised by the strike.

“Consorting with the enemy in time of war has always been punished by death by the Marshall Clan,” the man said, his face not moving a muscle.

Zac’s eyes drifted over to Charles, and he wondered just what kind of man he was before the integration. Something told him that the old man wasn’t one of the family members in prominent positions, but rather one of those working in the shadows.

It was a good reminder as well. The Marshall Clan wasn’t very strong now when compared to Port Atwood, but that was because his force improved with tremendous speed and left everyone in the dust. But the Marshall Clan teemed with talents that would probably shine when they had managed to completely adapt to the Multiverse.

“It seems we have been too lax with our members as of late, which is our mistake,” Charles continued as he started tapping away at a tablet. “I will make sure to rein any aspiring profiteers.”

“Thank you,” Zac said, not wanting to push the matter any further. “Inform Henry and the others we will delay the operation a week to recuperate.”

“We estimated each Incursion to take 5 days at the minimum to assault and incorporate,” Charles said with a smile. “You are ahead of schedule as it is. Slow and steady wins the race.”

Zac nodded and dragged the demon out of the building before he could cause any real trouble. Having pointed his shadow spears at everyone until he got answers was bad enough, though Charles didn’t seem to mind.

The two returned to Port Atwood, and Zac sent a guard to inform his squad of the break. Ogras disappeared the moment they exited the teleportation station, and Zac headed home. Kenzie was back in the cave it seemed, so Zac immediately erected the arrays around his courtyard before sitting down with a Dao Treasure in his hand.

His gains since meeting Salvation the last time were huge, but this time they would fight at that madman’s home turf. Reports indicated that he had turned hundreds of thousands of people into puppets, and who knew what kind of power he would be able to exert. Hoarding his treasures at such a time was a waste.

He stabilized his mind before biting into the treasure, swallowing the sweet juices of the mysterious fruit. His mind was immediately whisked away, and he was once again one with the Dao.

Due to the multiple intense battles recently he had gained no small amount of inspiration to improve his Dao. He had a pretty good idea of what to do with his Dao of Rot, Sanctuary, and Sharpness. But for this treasure, he chose to focus on Sharpness.

Rot had improved extremely rapidly, and he needed some more time to utilize it in battle before he felt ready to push it toward the peak mastery. Sanctuary was perhaps the one he was closest to improve due to the semi-completed vision he saw before Yrial ran out of power. But he still felt Sharpness was the way to go.

His inspiration came from various sources such as the extremely penetrative power of Nenotheop's strikes, the swarm of needles that Thanos used, and he even went back to the old vision of the Axe Man. His last insight was centered around speed through sharpness, to cut through all obstacles. His current insight was a continuation of that, but it rather centered on penetrative power, which in a sense was the essence of sharpness.

He wanted an edge that would be able to cut through anything, even the void if needed. The boundless Dao answered and he felt the seed housed in his axe fractal improve one step further. The mysterious effect of the Dao Treasure ended not long after, and he only had time to slightly stabilize his foundation of his improved Dao Seed before his mind returned to his body.

Zac opened his menu the moment he opened his eyes, eager to check his latest Dao improvement.

Sharpness (High): Strength +5, Dexterity +40, Intelligence +10, Wisdom +5

He had reached High mastery as expected, though Zac was a bit surprised at the attributes he received. Half of the 30 new points were added to Dexterity, whereas the rest got spread out over Strength, Intelligence, and Wisdom.

Still, what Zac cared about wasn't the Attribute gain any longer. It was the improvement stronger Dao Seeds brought to his battle strength. He had a feeling that his improved Seed of Sharpness would massively improve his lethality against stronger opponents. As he got up to his feet he immediately spotted Ogras sitting in a lounge outside his gates.

"I sensed the Dao through the Array. You wouldn't happen to be hoarding Dao Treasures by any chance?" Ogras said the moment Zac stepped out of the courtyard.

"That was my last one," Zac lied face without missing a step.

"I'm sure it was," Ogras muttered as he followed Zac toward the private teleporter.

There was nothing else for Zac to prepare, so he immediately activated the array to open a passage to the secret outpost that the Marshalls used to observe Salvation's actions.

They emerged in what seemed to be an abandoned cellar. The Marshalls had bought off the town from the former mayor, and it was one of the tens of thousands of small towns that managed to get a Nexus Node, but not much else. Most of these places became indefensible as the wildlife got stronger, and those who were strong enough opted to head to larger towns for safety.

According to Ogras, the number of towns would likely increase again in the future when more powerhouses emerged. A mid E-Grade warrior would be enough to stand guard of a town on a D-Grade world unless a particularly aggressive type of beast lived nearby. With the help of arrays, they would be able to fend most beasts unless a beast horde formed.

This place was quite far from the Cradle of God, as Salvation was relentless in his endeavor to eradicate every living being. Staying too close would mean that one eventually would get swallowed up by his puppet tides.

So even though the area that Salvation controlled was much smaller than the Dead Zone no one would stay in any neighboring towns, leaving a huge perimeter without a single living being. It took the two of

them almost three days of travel through untamed lands before they entered the area that could be considered part of the Cradle of God.

And they only needed to travel for another thirty minutes before they spotted the first puppet.