

The Fall 314

Chapter 314: Sneaking Inside

Zac and Ogras were currently hidden within some foliage up a tree, and they had made ample preparations to obscure their presence even further. Both wore treasures that hid one's life force, just like the amulet Zac used to trick the Zombies during the beast waves. Ogras was even continuously operating a shadow skill to hide them even further.

The two even used a portable arrays disk to hide from the mindless sentry, though they could only use it while they were stationary. The only way for them to be any better hidden was if they brought Janos as well who covered them in another layer of illusions, but he was occupied with the battle with the Zombies.

It might have been overkill, but Zac didn't want to take any chances with this excursion. The fact that Salvation got away still irked him, and he didn't want a repeat of that situation. Especially when he saw the man's rapid leveling speed. Salvation had long passed level 60, and likely received another round of powerups from his class quest.

But the worst thing was that Zac knew his levels likely came from killing humans rather than fighting off beasts or the invaders. Every day that lunatic remained alive even more suffering would descend on Earth.

"How intriguing," Ogras said as his eyes were trained on the puppet.

It was one of the guard sentries they had heard about. It simply stood on a small hill with good vantage in a certain direction, its head unceasingly moving back and forth like a moving camera. Other than that it was completely immobile.

"It slowly absorbs cosmic energy, but it is not cultivating. I would guess it possesses a gathering array to keep it going. That explains a lot," the demon continued.

"What do you mean?" Zac asked with some confusion.

"It likely means that these things and the way Salvation fights are not purely a result of a unique class," Ogras explained. "It is more likely a combination of an extremely intricate mother array that control these things, and a class that focuses on puppetry. Rather than a mystical class that does everything."

Zac slowly nodded in understanding. The prospect that Salvation was using tools to gain his current power was a relief since it would be pretty unsettling otherwise. He was lower level than Zac and not even on the Dao Ladder, yet he had almost fought evenly with Zac who had Thea for support.

"Does that help us in any way?" Zac asked.

"Well, breaking the connection between a mother array and its children is much easier than breaking the connection of a skill," Ogras said. "And it means we can substantially weaken Salvation if we find the mother array and destroy it."

"Don't you think it's on his person?" Zac ventured.

"Perhaps not," Ogras said with a shake of his head. "The more complicated the array the larger it needs to be to house the inscriptions. There are array plates as large as planets out in the multiverse from what I've heard. More skilled inscribers can inscribe smaller fractals, but I don't believe The Great Redeemer is skilled enough to cram an array like this into something that Salvation can carry on his body."

"It's not necessarily his own creation though," Zac countered.

"That's fair," Ogras nodded. "It might be something found in a Mystic Realm or on some dead powerhouse. That is a problem in itself. All the underlings of this Redeemer you've met are different class archetypes, making it hard to guess the situation with the boss."

"And it seems Calrin won't be able to dig up anything useful either," Zac added with some wistfulness.

There were no news from his side even after two weeks of asking around, trying to buy a report on the mysterious Redeemer. The man was either very discreet or Calrin's connections weren't good enough to get his hand on the information.

Zac was about to move on from the invader, but another thought suddenly struck him.

"Wait, will we even be able to kill the guy?" Zac blurted out. "He might have one or many of the Dominators guarding him."

"I thought about that as well, but I doubt it," Ogras said. "If our speculations are correct I don't think anyone would be happier than them if Salvation got himself killed. The Dominators should already be in a bad spot compared to those humans of the other world in the hunt, and if they have to contend with a direct disciple? Forget about it, they will probably throw you a banquet if you kill him."

Zac knew that what Ogras said was based on a lot of speculation on their side, but at the same time, he felt it made some sense. There had been no cooperation between the two forces during the hunt at all, and Salvation had been left alone even if he was weakened since he couldn't bring his puppet army. If the Dominators truly were concerned about his well-being they would have sent protection just like the Medhin with their guards.

"Fair enough. But if we see any non-puppet Zhix in the area we will need to rethink our plan," Zac decided. "Perhaps only cutting down the tree and then make a run for it."

"Fine, but I doubt there will be any living beings in this place if your description of that man is accurate," Ogras shrugged. "It sounds like something has broken his mind. Either the stress of the integration or the Inheritance the Great Redeemer left behind. In either case, it doesn't sound like he is in any position to make logical choices like keeping friendlies alive."

The puppets at the perimeter seemed to be in a passive state where they only performed a simple loop over and over, and Zac and Ogras had no problems proceeding further into the Cradle unobstructed. There were a few hidden sentries though that they only spotted thanks to Ogras' superior observation skills.

One was dug into the ground with only its head sticking out, and another one was crammed into a tree. It proved that the former humans were truly only seen as tools and that Salvation had them in

abundance if he could use them frivolously like this. They had spotted over a dozen sentries the past hour, and they had only traversed in an extremely small part of the Cradle of God.

The total number of sentries must count in the thousands, and Zac could understand why there was so little information about what was going on inside. Very few would be able to enter this place unnoticed, and fewer still were willing to take the risk. But to Ogras all these traps were like a child's game, and he unhurriedly guided the duo through the outer perimeter.

"So where are these trees of yours?" Ogras asked, prompting Zac to take out a tablet and open up a map.

"According to the guesses of the Marshall clan they should be roughly another five hours' travel due northeast," Zac said with some hesitation. "But if they are five hundred meters tall we should be able to see them much earlier."

His words turned prophetic 90 minutes later when they trekked up a small hill under the guise of some shrubbery. They wanted to get a better vantage to check for any threats as they were starting to get pretty far into the core of Salvation's Zone.

But after the outer perimeter of silver scouts, the zone was completely devoid of both living beings and puppets, making the two believe that Salvation kept a large chunk of his guards close at hand. What they did spot, however, was the gargantuan trees that towered into the sky in the distance. Some even reached above the clouds, a testament to how huge they had become.

Even though Zac was unable to properly gauge their height he had a strong suspicion that at least a few of them were large enough for him to complete his quest, and he motioned Ogras to lead the way.

It took them a few more hours before they reached the forest, and Even Ogras couldn't stop himself from being impressed by the majesty of the Redwoods. Zac had never gone to see them before the integration, but he had seen the pictures on the internet.

The forest they walked through now were far beyond what he had seen in pictures, as the trees had grown not only in height but also in width. Many reached more than twenty meters in diameter, and it was to the point that Zac started to hesitate whether he would even be able to fell one of these monstrosities in one swing.

He even started to feel a twang of guilt when he saw these majestic trees reaching up toward the skies, but he hardened his heart as they looked for a target. This was unfortunately not a time for environmental conservation. He truly needed the power up to fight the stronger Incursions. Otherwise, the losses on his side would turn disastrous.

Finally, the two found a tree that fit the bill. In contrast to the other trees it seemed to carry some sort of fungal infection, and cutting it down might even protect the forest from the spread of disease. Zac also had Ogras climb the thing with a fifty-meter rope to make sure it was tall enough, and the crown clocked in at over 540 meters. It was essentially a skyscraper from its dimensions.

"When this tree goes down the sound will probably be enough to alert the whole country," Ogras commented as he knocked on the trunk that was larger than a basketball court. "It must weigh an insane amount. You might even cause an earthquake."

"If I can even bring this thing down," Zac muttered as he looked at it with some hesitation.

As he had grown stronger he was able to create a longer and longer edge with [Chop], though it was still unstable above ten meters in length. Now he needed to at least triple that number, and keep it active long enough to swipe through the whole tree.

But nothing ventured nothing gained.

"Get ready to run," Zac only said, as he took out [Verun's Bite] and walked up next to the trunk.

The edge from [Chop] grew with rapid speed until the edge reached ten meters, where Zac momentarily stopped its growth. He needed to instantly push it to 35 meters or so from there, and do it as quickly as possible.

Zac simply decided to push his energy control to the limit and completely flood the fractal on his hand with as much energy as he possibly could. He found that his training with the mental puzzle helped somewhat, as it also made the control of his Cosmic Energy smoother. To stabilize the skill further he imbued it with his recently improved Dao Seed as well.

The edge gained a silver sheen from his Late-stage Dao of Sharpness as it stretched out from his axe until it started to gain ridiculous proportions. He tried to maintain a semblance of control of the fractal edge as long as possible as it grew, but he felt it was starting to become unstable the moment he passed fifteen meters.

He did everything he could to have the Cosmic Energy remain its shape until it finally reached the necessary length. His axe was already moving with fluid motion the moment the fractal edge became long enough, but he started to frown as the edge tore through the wood.

There was significant resistance to his swing, even with his E-Grade axe and Dao of Sharpness combining to make an extremely strong attack. The properties of the wood had clearly been strengthened by the Cosmic Energy to allow it to support its own massive weight.

Zac's muscles strained to push through the tree as his mind started to become dizzy from the effort of maintaining the shape of the edge. But just as it was about to pass through the other end it finally fizzled, leaving a small piece still intact. Disappointment started to flood Zac's mind, but his hopes reignited when the tree started to creak ominously.

"Did your quest complete?" Ogras asked, and Zac opened his status screen as the two started to create some distance from the redwood.

The attack had contained enough momentum to make the tree swing, and the movements were in turn enough to break off the last piece of the

A thunderous explosion that caused the ground to shake spread out in the area the moment the tree slammed into the ground, taking two smaller redwoods with it. Zac and Ogras were thrown tens of meters in the air, wildly flailing until Ogras shot a shadow spear into a nearby tree with one hand, and grabbed Zac with the other.

It was as though a hurricane went through the forest and the remaining trees wildly swayed back and forth, making Zac fear that he had started off a chain reaction with his attack. But the area soon calmed down, allowing Zac to breathe out in relief and open his status screen and enter the skill tab.

Deforestation - Proficiency: Early. Their army is the forest and you are the Hatchetman. Upgradeable.

The swing had counted as a success, and Zac breathed out in relief. He realized the quest had told him to cut the tree down in one swing rather than to completely cut through it so that the edge didn't go all the way through wasn't the end of the world. The quest had likely finished the moment the tree slammed into the ground, but the shockwave had made Zac miss the fact that he gained another fractal on his right bicep.

As he read the description he was reminded of the flavor text of his Hatchetman class. It had said something very familiar, and it almost felt like [Deforestation] was the signature skill of his class. Zac really wanted to try it out as soon as possible, but another change made him stop in his tracks.

[Chop], the first attack skill that he obtained had finally evolved from Late to Peak Mastery, becoming the first skill to do so. His skills hadn't improved as quickly as his Daos, and he was quite far away from pushing them all to the peak. He briefly wondered what he could do to push his skills further, but a prod from Ogras brought him out of his musings.

"Holy crap," Ogras muttered, losing some of his trademark calm as he pointed toward a field in the distance.

Any thoughts of skills were thrown out of Zac's head as he visibly paled from what he saw. Holy crap was exactly what Zac felt when he saw the ocean of silver puppets that swarmed toward their position.

And above the puppets hundreds of silver rivers streaked across the sky, forming a beautiful pattern that spoke of impending doom.