

The Fall 335

Chapter 335: Ascension Breaker

Zac froze in the middle of his rampage when he noticed the screen in front of him. The momentarily lapse in concentration allowed one of the animals to leap up at him, clenching its mandibles around his throat while trying to scratch open his chest.

The bite wasn't anywhere near strong enough to cut off his head, but it did draw some black ichor with its bite. The pain woke Zac up and he destroyed the Battleroach with a swing of his axe. Battle lust roared in his mind, but he forced himself to stop in his tracks and curl down on the ground with [Immutable Bulwark] covering his whole body.

It was his self-invented turtle stance that allowed him a breather in return for an increased expenditure of miasma. The roaches kept their assault going, desperately trying to claw or bite through the thick shield, which only got them whittled down by the specters of [Deathwish]. Zac didn't hunker down to catch a breather though, but rather to be able to read the quest without interruptions.

Ascension Breaker (Unique, Limited): Stop the Battleroach King from Evolving into a Primordial Warroach. Reward: [Primordial Breath Amanita], Death Attuned Skill [03:06:23:54].

Zac slowly read through the quest to not miss any details, but it seemed quite straightforward. Somewhere in the cave the insect boss was located, and it seemed that it would evolve in three days. It reminded Zac of the image of the monkey Herald silently cultivating under the Tree of Ascension. But Zac's eyes were mostly glued to the rewards, both of which were quite tempting.

He had no idea what a [Primordial Breath Amanita] was, but it surely wasn't anything useless. Anything referring to the Primordial Chaos probably had a great origin. This was because it was generally accepted that the two great Daos of Creation and Oblivion were born from the Primordial Chaos, meaning primordial items might have a connection to the highest of Daos.

Of course, sometimes things were named after the Primordial Chaos simply to sound overbearing or more valuable than things truly were.

The Death Attuned Skill was an even greater lure for him, and he knew what it was a reward tailored to his current needs. The whole reason he entered this den was to gain another skill, and with the help of the quest he might actually walk away with two skills rather than one.

He had already been meaning to explore the depths of this place for any potential reward, but this made him even more eager to head down. Besides, if things proved too dangerous he could always jump into the water and swim to safety. However, as if hearing Zac's thoughts another line of text appeared next to the quest.

[Note: Exits closed. Exits will remain sealed for 1 year upon failure of quest.]

"That's the System I remember," Zac sighed with some helplessness.

It looked like he had no choice but to give it his all to stop the battleroach boss from evolving, and he had a decent idea of what that meant. By traveling with Verana and the beastmasters of the Tal-Eladar the past days he had learned quite a bit about beasts and their cultivation system. While titles and

classes were the two largest factors for differences in power between two warriors, the deciding factors for the power of a beast were their bloodline and its purity.

Something that had confused Zac for a long time was the fact that pretty much all the beasts he had met, from the Barghest to the wolf waves, were equally strong as their brethren. This was because beasts didn't have any titles, and they didn't possess classes either.

Their bloodline was their class, and their levels came with a higher number of raw attributes to compensate for the lack of titles. A strong bloodline would give more attribute points, whereas a weak bloodline would give fewer. Greater bloodlines would also provide a greater number of bloodline skills, like the terrifying beam the Star Ox released at him during the hegemony trial.

But the type of bloodline was not the only important factor to consider. There was also the purity of the bloodline. As generations passed the bloodline of a race might get diluted, pushing the race further and further from their powerful ancestor. In fact, Vul, the Barghest Herald, was not a different race than the other Barghest even though it was far more dangerous. It was simply a talented Barghest whose bloodline had been purified by Clan Azh'Rezak.

Beasts could also purify their bloodline on their own, by slowly rotating their energy to expel impurities. This process could be drastically sped up if the beasts stayed close to natural treasures. The herbs or metals continuously emitted excess energy while they grew or evolved, which was why almost all treasures had beasts guardians close-by. They were using the treasures to essentially cultivate, and losing the treasure would mean losing their chance to evolve.

A skilled Beast Master spent most of their wealth and efforts on purifying the bloodlines of their contracted beasts. It would not only drastically increase their power and longevity, but the bloodline also dictated how far the beast could reach on the road of cultivation. Some of the more intelligent beasts even voluntarily entered contracts with Cultivators in order to get help with improving their bloodline.

But apart from purifying the bloodline there was another, but far rarer possibility; bloodline evolution. It was possible to ascend to a higher tier of being, which usually brought a tremendous boost in power. It was akin to a housecat evolving into a saber-toothed tiger. This was something that might happen through mutation, but it mostly required a great treasure or some other rare opportunity.

Zac was suspecting that this was the type of evolution he needed to stop, rather than simply stopping an F-Grade to E-Grade evolution. Since the weakest beasts at the edge of the hive were almost at the peak of the F-Grade, there was no way that the Battleroach King hadn't already evolved to E-Grade. Since it was much too early into the integration to talk about evolving to D-Grade, then Bloodline Evolution was the most likely scenario.

Zac closed the menu with a sigh as he got back up on his feet, and with a wide swing created some space from the densely packed battleroaches. He had initially planned on pushing downward step by step, grinding for over a week if need be, but now he felt the clock ticking.

Zac also couldn't stop some worry from creeping in, making him second-guess his decision to come to this place. His experience with most quests so far was that he had been pushed to his limit, barely surviving the trials. That was simply how the System worked. If it was too easy the System wouldn't

provide any good rewards. If it was impossible it wouldn't give out the quest since its purpose was to train, not to kill.

Before he kept descending any further into the cave system he first fought his way back to the water. It was the waterline that had allowed Emma to return alive, but when Zac arrived he noticed with some helplessness that a shimmering shield covered the water. It was the System blocking any escape, and he knew better than to try to brute force it.

Instead, he turned back and started making his way down the cavern. The onslaught of battleroaches was relentless, and Zac had killed over a thousand by the time his area was wiped clean. There were still swarms of the roaches remaining further down judging from the incessant clattering echoing from the depths, but it didn't look like they were interested in coming up to his floor.

Cleansing the first floor had taken a bit over an hour, and the short burst of intense carnage had almost given him two full levels. The speed would shock anyone else, but Zac was actually a bit disappointed. While killing the battleroaches provided a steady stream of energy, each kill provided just a fraction of what he would receive from killing a cultivator at the same level.

But the situation was still pretty great since the roaches were completely berserk. They didn't try to avoid the insectoid specters at all, making it possible for [Deathwish] to continuously kill targets even with its limited power. The battle had proven pretty easy, with the only issue being the somewhat high energy consumption. Less than half his miasma remained, as the returns from [Fields of Despair] couldn't match the expenditure from constantly utilizing multiple skills.

He initially wanted to head straight down to his next floor as to not waste any time, but since he needed to rest up he first walked over to the wall with the shimmering crystals. Inspecting the wall proved he was correct that there definitely was some relation between the crystals and the insects.

At a closer look, he saw that there were quite a few holes where crystals had been extracted, and scratch marks around a few other places indicated that some insect had tried, and failed, to rip out crystals. It only increased his curiosity about the green energy inside, because no matter how he looked at it he didn't sense anything special.

He gingerly touched one of the crystals, and after nothing happened he ripped it out of the wall for further study. The lights kept buzzing inside the crystal even after getting extracted, but no matter what Zac did he couldn't figure out the purpose of these things. However, when Zac accidentally held the crystal close to [Verun's Bite] the slumbering spirit inside stirred.

Zac felt some hope that he had finally found something else that Verun wanted to absorb. One troubling realization after he had evolved the axe to E-Grade was that it no longer used blood to evolve. It still consumed the blood of evolved beings to charge up its fractal, but it didn't do anything to unlock the other four fractals on the haft. Zac had a feeling that he needed to find treasures that would unlock each of the five fractals before evolving it to D-Grade.

Truthfully he had been worried that the axe had become such a picky eater that it would only drink D-Grade blood to evolve, but perhaps Zac simply hadn't found the right materials. If the axe liked these crystals he would evolve verun in no time, since there were thousands of them in just the room he was

standing in. But unfortunately the axe grew disinterested after a few seconds, no longer giving the shimmering crystal any attention.

It was disappointing, but Zac knew he was still on the highest floor. Perhaps the crystals around him were something that Verun wanted, but they were F-Grade when the axe needed crystals of a higher grade.

Greed shimmered in Zac's eyes as he looked at the crystal-studded walls. He truly wanted to pick each one since the crystals were something good enough that even the picky Verun woke up. But he was currently working against the clock, as getting locked inside this place for a year would spell disaster for not only himself but Earth as a whole.

The crystal was put into his Cosmos Sack since Verun wouldn't eat it, and Zac headed over to the entrance to the next floor. It was a large hole straight in the ground, and looking down into it was like looking down into the abyss. There were no crystals in the hole, and the only clue there was something beneath was the incessant susurrus of innumerable insects moving about.

Zac sat down next to the hole as he took out two E-Grade Miasma crystals. Luckily he had stocked up on crystals through Calrin before entering the Underworld, and he would be able to fight non-stop for weeks with the help of his reserves of Miasma Crystals.

His stores of death-attuned energies were filled up in four hours, and Zac stood up to look down into the abyss. Nothing ventured nothing gained, so Zac simply jumped down into the hole, placing his shield beneath himself as he imbued his body with the Dao of Heaviness.

The air screamed around him as he shot downward like a bullet, reaching the next level in just a few seconds. The whole cave shook from the shockwave of Zac's landing and even the impossibly hard foundation showed some cracks. A surge of energy also welcomed his arrival as at least fifty battleroaches died from the impact.

Zac got up to his feet and shook his head. His ears were ringing, and even he was a bit discombobulated by slamming into the extremely hard ground. But his axe was already moving through muscle memory, and the sounds of pitched battle erupted once more.