

The Fall 351

Chapter 351: Out of Control

The enormous fist of the three-meter humanoid slammed down with tremendous force, aiming to finally end everything. But just as it was about to reach its target the air shuddered, and the arm was cleanly cut off. The ground shook slightly as the arm that seemed to weigh over a hundred kilos fell, but not a drop of blood escaped from the huge wound.

Of course, the Corpse Golem didn't even flinch from losing an appendage and immediately tried to attack Thea with its remaining arm. But [Petalstorm] had already returned to her side after saving the lives of one of the squads that had veered too deep, and the towering humanoid was bisected into ten pieces in short order.

Not that Thea wasn't able to take out the undead in other ways. But using skills instead of her weapon would cost her more Cosmic Energy, a resource that had turned into the most precious treasure the past days. She shook her head and activated [Gale Step], disappearing from the area as she rode turbulent winds of the battlefield.

Since she managed to gain insight into the Seed of Lightness to support her other seeds her speed had gained a huge upgrade. Combining the Seed of Gust with the Seed of Lightness for her movement skill turned her into a mirage, flittering across the battlefield with almost impossible speed.

She couldn't be bogged down in this seemingly unending war of attrition, she had her goals to accomplish. Normally she wouldn't have stopped for one of those macabre constructs, but she destroyed it by convenience since it was guarding one of her targets.

Thea had already spotted her next prey, a zombie of a young Asian woman who was no taller than 155 centimeters. What set her apart from the rest of the zombies was her enlarged skull and the thick veins throbbing across her forehead. This one didn't seem to be protected by a guardian, but it rather tried to hide through blending in with the rest of the zombies for safety.

But Thea had become an expert at spotting the zombie captains over the past weeks, and she flashed over, completely ignoring all the Zombies beneath. She still got a constant stream of cosmic energy though, as her invisible weapon mowed straight through the undead horde as it accompanied her in her hunt.

While Thea was extremely hard to spot due to her speed she hadn't activated [Skyshroud] to turn herself almost completely invisible. The shroud cost too much to be worth it since it also added a defensive barrier. The normal zombies didn't even notice her presence as it was, but the large-headed zombie immediately spotted her and released a shriek that made the air shudder.

"Another mid-tier," Thea muttered with a small smile as an amulet around her neck lit up to block out most of the mental attack contained in the scream.

Between her amulet and [Calm Seas] the attack that would have turned most cultivators' brains into mush was effortlessly deflected, not even able to delay Thea a second. She was right in front of the control zombie just a second later, and Cosmic Energy entered the fractal on the top of her hand as she activated [Windblade].

It was just a basic skill that she got inside the Tutorial, but it had been raised to peak mastery recently, giving it a substantial boost in its efficiency. With the addition of the Seed of Sharpness and Seed of Lightness it turned into a large scythe of death that swept across the area for a very small amount of Cosmic Energy.

Cosmic Energy surged into her body as the blade killed over a hundred elite zombies before they managed to exhaust its energies, but Thea frowned when she saw that the control zombie exploded into a mess of flesh and viscera before the blade even struck her. Thea quickly looked in all directions, and thankfully spotted an engorged zombie slowly walking away in the distance.

The large zombie looked as though he had a huge tumor on his stomach, and he was shaking as he shuffled toward the core of the sea of zombies. Thea only snorted and [Petalstorm] shot out with blazing speed, blasting a large hole through its torso. Rotten innards spilled out from the zombie as it fell over, but that was not all that fell out.

The maimed body of the control zombie fell out of the stomach of the zombie as well, and it was already dead from the pass-through of the invisible Spirit Tool. Thea had already seen this type of macabre escape tactic before, where the zombie leader somehow transported into the body of a larger undead like a parasite, and ordered their hosts to flee from the battle.

The moment that the control zombie was killed by the strike chaos took hold of the whole sector of the zombie army around her. The tens of thousands of Zombies that were once under the large-headed zombie's control immediately splintered off from the horde, veering straight for the army that radiated with life-force in the distance.

Thea wasn't worried though, as that was all according to plan. The zombies would be dead even before they reached the defensive line.

Since Thea still had quite a bit of energy remaining she stayed in the sea of zombies for another twenty minutes, allowing her to kill a handful of more control zombies and thousands of the normal undead before she started to make her way back toward her camp with plenty energy to spare. Staying any longer might draw the ire of that terrifying being in the center of the horde again.

She had barely made it out with her life in once piece the last time the Corpse Lord tried to kill her, and she wasn't ready to contend against it just yet. The undead general was simply too strong to defeat within the undead horde, which was likely the reason she stayed over there rather than joining the constant raids. It would require huge sacrifices to bring that woman down, but they hadn't reached that point just yet.

Thea quickly closed in on the million-man-army sending out a handful of [Windblades] to cull some dense groups of zombies on the way. Of course, the army didn't actually consist of a million people, but after the forced conscription there were at least 400 000 people that maintained a constant battle against the tide of zombies in this sector.

And this was only one of the five sectors going all out against the zombies, though only the Zhix horde was larger than her army. She didn't love the fact that they were forced to push unwilling people to the front-lines, but the very fate of their planet was at stake.

“Good job. You killed enough controllers to keep us occupied for over an hour,” Mark said while handing Thea a water bottle as she entered the command tent.

Controllers were what they called the zombies that kept the enormous sea of braindead zombies in line. Normally they shouldn’t have been able to constrain themselves with so many living targets nearby, but they had always kept a semblance of order even when the armies tried everything to trick the undead to splinter from the main horde.

But they finally managed to find some clues, partly with the help of Big Blue, and through chance encounters with the controllers. They finally learned that every single zombie in the horde was controlled by a stronger zombie. However, it didn’t seem there was a single undead strong enough to control over a hundred million zombies, so they had created an efficient hierarchy with the help of the mutant zombies with improved mental capabilities.

One low-tier control zombie was able to give simple commands to roughly a thousand normal or elite zombies. It was thanks to them that they didn’t simply run off to hunt for something to bite. These low-tiered control zombies were in turn controlled by mid-tier captains, such as the ones that Thea just killed.

One of them could control between ten and fifty low-tier commanders, meaning that one mid-tier zombie could control up to roughly 50 000 zombies depending on their strength. And things followed that pattern with high tier controllers, though Thea had only managed to find and kill one of them. Presumably, some peak controller was keeping the whole army in check, or perhaps it was the Corpse Lord herself holding the reins.

In either case, they soon learned that targeting the mid-tier commanders was the most efficient tactic to destroy the cohesiveness of the zombie horde. Killing a low-tier commander would only let a thousand zombies loose, and that wasn’t worth the trouble. Thea could personally kill that number with a couple of windblades.

Killing a high-tier commander wasn’t really efficient either, as the mid-tier controllers were usually smart enough to stay put and wait for orders. But when a mid-tier commander was killed their subordinates almost immediately turned to small raiding parties that unhesitantly rushed the waiting armies of the living in the distance. Only when another commander reined them in fast enough would they stay put within the zombie horde.

“How are things going at the main front?” Thea asked as she took a swig from the canteen.

“It’s pretty desperate,” Mark said with a grimace. “If those insectoids didn’t bolster our numbers we would have been overrun by now. But the constant bombardment is rapidly depleting our cache of old-world weaponry. Over a thousand tanks have been destroyed just over the past day. The undead truly refuses to give up on their chosen path.”

“Well, that would ruin the array they’re making,” Thea nodded. “How long can we keep going?”

“Three days, perhaps four,” Mark sighed. “A few days longer if our searches for military bases are successful. But sooner or later the constant barrage of the undead will reach a tipping point where our line breaks and all hell breaks loose.”

"Maybe I should head over there?" Thea hesitantly ventured.

Things were rough on their end, where over a thousand people died every hour, but it was nothing compared to the mayhem at the front. Those people were tasked with contesting every step forward the undead took, by any means necessary.

"No point," Mark said with a shake of his head. "Our work here is helping them as well. This army killed almost three million Zombies yesterday even though our elites are at the main army. We're stealing their momentum and making sure that the leaders of the horde doesn't send all their powerhouses to the frontline."

Thea sighed and nodded with some helplessness. It just felt bad that she stayed here in relative safety while her family members were risking everything to stop the horde in their tracks. But she was the only one who was able to constantly hunt the control zombies to splinter the horde.

"What about the other hordes?" she asked.

"Nothing new," Mark said. "Port Atwood's people are still missing. The Sino-Indian Alliance is fighting a losing war, only nipping at the heels of the army. They will not be able to stop the advance of the horde unless something drastically changes."

"And the movement from the invaders?" Thea asked.

"They are staying clear of us and are focusing on the minor undead hordes. There seems to be an implicit agreement where all the armies avoid each other, targeting only the undead. The zealots are quite terrifying according to our reports, turning every battlefield to hell on earth."

Thea mulled over the information, though it seemed not much had changed the past hours. Everyone was desperately struggling to stop the Undead Empire, but they were powerful enough to take on the combined powers of all forces without even revealing all their cards. Almost no one would be able to stop them if their leaders joined the fight.

"What about Zac? Any word from him?" Thea asked.

"Nothing. There has been no sighting of him for two weeks. Some believe he is in closed-door cultivation since reaching level 75, that he's aiming to break through to E-Grade. But our informants believe he has found the Underworld and is busy taking control of its riches," Mark said with some dissatisfaction.

Thea frowned as well, not understanding what Zac was thinking. The idea was for him to quickly close the other incursions before joining the battle against the undead, but he only closed a handful of them before disappearing. He hadn't even gone to help his own people from what they could tell, since he would have to have used their network to get close to the Dead Zone.

She truly hoped he could appear sooner rather than later. Things were turning pretty bleak, and the world needed a hero.