

## The Fall 354

### Chapter 354: Sortie

"They were a bit stronger than we expected," Zac simply said, not wanting to go into detail just how close they came to dying a few hours ago.

Ogras played along, donning a lackadaisical look as he hid the fact that he couldn't put any weight on one of his legs. Zac obviously wouldn't divulge that his right arm still wasn't working either.

"I just wanted to tell you that we're fine, but that we're heading out again. We're going to search for our people, it might take a few weeks," Zac added.

"Great, I'm coming with," Kenzie said as she stood up, patting her leggings.

"Absolutely not," Zac said without hesitation.

"I'm going," Kenzie said with a glare. "You've kept me on the Island long enough. I am starting to feel like a prisoner, and I need some combat experience to keep improving."

"What about studying arrays?" Zac asked. "And the funnel?"

"I can do that as well. Won't we be sitting on your spaceship most of the time?" Kenzie immediately retorted. "Besides, I've pushed my defensive seed to High mastery and even gotten a Water seed that helps with restoration. I am almost as unkillable as you!"

"Girl, you haven't been using the funnel for yourself, have you?" Ogras probed with suspicion in his eyes. "My head almost got split in two to snatch that thing, you know?"

"I don't need that thing to improve a few Dao Seeds," Kenzie snorted.

"Monster siblings," the demon muttered under his breath, receiving a synchronized eye-roll in return.

"It's great that you've improved your Daos, but the Undead Empire is the strongest force on the planet, we have no idea of the dangers we might face," Zac said. "We probably won't just be fighting the newly turned Zombies this time."

"The girl is pretty good with her spells," Ogras interjected. "She's even better than most of the other girls you bring along everywhere, and we have room on the flying treasure."

Zac shot a murderous glare at the demon, but he acted oblivious to the implicit threat. Soon enough Zac was forced to acquiesce to his sister's demands. Ultimately he knew that he couldn't keep her locked away on the island forever since that would harm her future development even if she had help from Jeeves.

But he was her big brother, worrying came with the job. Of course, with both himself and Ogras there along with the small hill of defensive treasures he had decked her out in she would have a hard time getting hurt even if she was in the middle of a sea of Zombies. And she did not only survive the Tutorial but also staying at a border town for months, so she wasn't some helpless damsel in distress.

“Fine, but don’t take any unnecessary risks. Our main goal is to find and eventually save our people, not to have some last stand against the Undead,” Zac said before turning to Ogras. “Is everything prepared?”

“The others are waiting by the public teleporter in Port Atwood,” Ogras said. “There have also been some odd developments, but I thought I would brief everyone when we’re on the move. Don’t forget to withdraw a mountain of crystals for the flying treasure from the town coffers.”

“I need to get a few things as well,” Kenzie added. “I’ll join you in a bit.”

Zac nodded and the group met up again at the teleportation array in Port Atwood ten minutes later. Zac had gone to take out some of Port Atwood’s resources from the Merit Exchange for the trip. He didn’t know the state of the army so he brought out a large number of healing pills, Nexus Crystals, spare weaponry, and even food in case they had run out.

Ogras and Kenzie were already there, and they were joined by Tylia and eight Valkyries. Zac was surprised that neither Verana nor any demons were around, and he looked over at Ogras with some confusion.

“Verana will stay in the Underworld and consolidate our gains and start working on dealing with the Incursions there. I let the brat stay as well to be with her family,” Ogras said before nodding at Tylia. “This one has a skill-set that might prove helpful, and the eight girls will be able to form a small War Array for your sister. Room’s limited so I didn’t bring anyone else. I wanted to find the big ox, but it turns out he went fighting with the Marshall girl.”

Zac’s eyes lit up in understanding, and he felt it was a solid enough lineup. Billy would have been a good addition, but he could probably do more good helping in the fight against the other horde.

“So where are we going?” Zac asked.

“We’ll head to Westfort, and a person from the Sino-Indian Alliance there will take us to Erdenet, the closest array that I could find to where we last heard from our people. There was an array just a few day’s travel away from them, but it got swallowed by the interference as well,” Ogras explained.

Zac nodded and didn’t waste any more time, and just a few minutes later they stood in the Mongolian town. The guide bowed and immediately returned through the teleporter, leaving the small group to their own devices. They walked over to a cleared-out field and Zac immediately summoned the flying tool he got from the Hunt.

The Sky Gnomes had long figured out how to activate the large metallic ball and Zac infused some energy into it, making it quickly grow and change shape. It was as Calrin said, it was one of the simplest flying tools imaginable, only forming a simple disk that they would sit on. It was nothing like the sleek spaceship or the magical steampunk flying vessel he had imagined.

This was actually the first time he would use it since he didn’t feel too confident flying it in the Underworld, where the high ceiling could be swapped out by a narrow passage at moment’s notice. He only had the one and didn’t want to crash it.

The group sat down on the large circular surface, and Zac placed a couple of E-Grade crystals into their sockets and placed his hand on a control array. The next moment it floated up into the skies and shot out of the town with tremendous speed.

The air screamed around them, but the group of 12 weren't buffeted by the winds in the slightest as the flying tool at least possessed some sort of protective array. Zac greatly enjoyed the feeling of flying, and he couldn't stop himself from making the treasure take some sharp turns as it flew across the hills.

"Is it out of your system? You're going in the wrong direction," the demon said with a snort, and Zac hastily changed course with an embarrassed cough.

"Okay, so update me on the situation," Zac said after the disk started to fly southward.

"Things are turning pretty chaotic in this area," Ogras said. "I went by the Marshall Spy Agency just before now, and large changes have taken place."

"Changes how?" Zac asked.

"For one there are dozens of hordes now, though the three initial ones are still far larger than the others," Ogras started explaining as he took out a tablet from his Cosmos Sack. "They are traveling in irregular patterns, and no one could understand what the hell they were doing until recently."

"And what's that?" Zac asked.

"They're making a mind-bogglingly huge array where the Dead Zone is just the core," Ogras said with a shake of his head.

Zac was shocked to hear such a thing since the original Dead Zone was almost as large in area as the former United States. Such a massive piece of land was just the core? But he suddenly remembered the words of the Technocrat he interrogated the other day, and some fear gripped his heart.

"Terraforming," Zac muttered with a frown.

"Exactly," Ogras nodded with a serious face. "An array this large can only be used for something terrifying like destroying the whole planet. I believe they want to make this planet death-attuned. I don't know how it works, but all the planets in the Undead Empire naturally produce Miasma rather than Cosmic Energy, and I believe this Array is the key.

"So if they manage to form the array we're screwed?" Zac asked.

"I am not sure. I've asked the blue one to gather information. Such a search might draw some ire from the Undead Empire, but we've already passed that point. But I would personally guess that it would take some time to activate such a huge array," Ogras shrugged. "Also, there's some good news."

"Oh? What's that?" Zac asked, happy to take any good news he could get.

"We're not the only ones worried about the Undead Empire's actions. There have been reports of multiple alien armies arriving in the contested area, mainly from the neighboring Incursions," Ogras said. "Most notably the insane cultists have arrived in full force. Massive battles took place yesterday where a few of the smaller Hordes were eradicated to the last zombie."

"Makes sense, if the Undead Empire activates that Array it is probably game over for all the other invaders as well. They would have to leave the planet immediately," Zac nodded.

"Exactly. And they're not the only ones joining the battle. The insect people have amassed huge armies that have taken down at least three Zombie hordes as well. There are millions of them fighting like they're possessed," Ogras said. "They've marched for weeks to finally join the war."

"What about the dominators?" Zac asked. "Are they still banking on us doing the work for them?"

"The Marshall's are not sure," Ogras said with a shake of his head. "Their network is quite impressive, but it can't cover the whole area, especially not now when large parts are cut off from teleportation."

"I don't think the Dominators can just sit still any longer," Kenzie added from the side. "If they don't do anything they will lose everything as well. They need to at least stall the undead until we can battle them."

"We just assume they are staying in the shadows though," Ogras said. "No point on basing our plans on our enemies assisting us."

"Sounds fair enough. So, where are we heading?" Zac asked as he glanced down at the ground moving rapidly beneath them.

Ogras pressed a few buttons and a map appeared on the tablet he was holding.

"Alea's outpost was in this small town, Hanliun, when the area got blocked. The main army was a day's march away, harassing one of the main hordes together with the Sino-Indian Alliance," Ogras started narrating.

"There was such a distance between the camp and the army?" Zac asked with confusion.

"Remember the Zombie horde numbered over a hundred million, and most of it is shrouded in Miasma. They didn't want to risk the lives of the non-combatants, and having a headquarter that was constantly on the move would become a problem," Ogras explained. "So they kept a healthy distance and communicated through crystals, though they might have become blocked as well by now."

"We cannot know for sure what happened after they lost contact, but I believe they would retreat from the area," the demon continued. "The only path that makes sense is northwest toward the closest teleporter in Baoqui. What they don't know is that Baoqui's teleporter is blocked as well."

"So we head to that town to meet up with them?" Zac asked.

"Yes, though they would likely reach that place a few days before us judging by the speed we're going. We could try to anticipate their next move, but there's no obvious direction they could take after reaching Baoqui," Ogras sighed.

"So if we take the safe route we'll lose time," Zac murmured.

"At least a day," Ogras nodded.

"But if we take a chance we might miss them completely," Zac concluded.

A full day could make a huge difference depending on their situation. By that point they would have been fending for themselves for almost ten days. He might be able to rely on his extremely high Luck to pick the right direction, but was he willing to bet his people's lives on it?

"We'll take the safe route for now," Zac eventually decided. "But we might adjust as we get closer. Perhaps we can increase the altitude on this thing enough that we can see them far from the distance?"

"I am sure there are restrictions for that," Tylia said, speaking up for the first time in a while. "I have heard that low-grade flying treasures rely on the energy from the ground. The energy is sparser in the sky, so they have built-in restrictions so they won't fall out of the sky."

Zac looked over at the demon, who nodded in confirmation.

"Well, we'll see how far up it will allow us to go later then. By the way, have you ever seen anything like this?" Zac asked Ogras as he took out one of the top-grade crystals with the green shimmering lights within.

The demon stretched out his arm to take the shimmering crystal with interest, but he was preceded by the Tal-Eladar who snatched it up with shock in her eyes.

"High Purity Beast Crystals!" Tylia blurted out as her eyes widened.