

The Fall 355

Chapter 355: Baoqui

"Young lord... The Tir'Emarel clan would be happy to buy any such crystals you have in your possession," Tylia said, her eyes not leaving the crystal for a second.

Zac knew he had hit the jackpot when he saw Tylia's reaction. She wasn't even a Beast Master, yet she had such an overblown reaction.

"Those are pretty good things," Ogras said with a whistle. "Just the normal purity ones are even more valuable than attuned crystals, the high purity ones are treasures."

"What are they good for?" Zac asked, though he had a pretty good idea already.

"Beasts can't use Nexus Crystals for leveling for some reason. They can stay in a mine and benefit from the increased density of energies, but they can't directly absorb the energy from the crystals themselves," Ogras said. "But they can directly benefit from beast crystals."

"But I can't sense any energy in these things?" Zac interjected.

"I don't really know how it works, but the beasts eat these things like food and slowly digest them. It helps them gain levels while also purifying their bloodline to a certain degree," the demon continued.

"High purity crystals even helps with the foundations of creating a Beast Crystal in the future," Tylia added from the side. "Feeding your contracted beast crystals will essentially help it grow faster, and you can still give it other treasures to help it improve. The two don't clash. Buying beast crystals is a major cost for most Classes working with beasts."

"So are they rare?" Zac asked.

"Not exceedingly rare, but far more uncommon than normal Nexus Crystals," Tylia said. "I'd say the crystal in your hand is worth around a million Nexus Coins. Lower purity Crystals are not worth as much though."

Zac whistled in surprise, knowing that there were almost two hundred such crystals in his cosmos sack. Better yet, there were thousands upon thousands of crystals left in the mine. Even if the worse crystals weren't worth as much he was sure the value of the mine was multiple billions. It was a true treasure trove.

The Crystals would also come in handy in case his experiment with the newborn Ayr Hivequeen worked out. The former Pet Shop Employee had already gotten a beast-related class, but she hadn't been able to form a connection with the queen yet. But with the help of the experts among the Tal-Eladar he was sure he'd be able to groom even more beast masters over the coming years. Perhaps he could trade some crystals for knowledge in beast rearing.

Of course, the real price form that cave was likely the [Primordial Breath Amanita], but Zac wasn't sure if discussing it with a Tal-Eladar was the best idea. He'd wait until he was alone with Calrin or Khar, the golem in charge of the Merit Exchange back in Port Atwood.

Tylia kept trying to find out where Zac got his hands on the crystals or at least buy them from him, but he ignored her attempts as he focused on recuperation. He was still far from fully restored, with multiple bones broken in his body.

Luckily the flying disk was essentially on autopilot after activating it. A connection had formed in his mind, and he didn't need to keep his hand on the control array. It zapped through the air with great speed, flying at an altitude of a few hundred meters.

Ogras was even worse off than Zac, so the demon had closed his eyes in meditation as soon as he had explained the situation to the others. He had looked mostly fine since returning from the Technocrat Incursion, but Zac had noticed the small tremors in his hands signaling that he was in great pain.

The others simply spent most of their time cultivating. Kenzie switched between cultivating and reading the crystals on formations. She had already finished the first crystal, but after that her progress had slowed to a crawl. This was nothing odd of course. The 8 crystals held the condensed knowledge on the art of Arrays from a D-Grade sect. It wasn't something that could be digested in a day or two.

Zac wanted to go through the various things he had looted from the Technocrat Incursion together with his sister, but he knew that now was not the time. Not even Ogras was completely clued in to the details of their relationship with the Technocrats, so he could only wait until they were alone.

The days passed in silence as they crossed the vast lands of Pangea. The cost of travel would ruin the average cultivator on Earth, but the expense wasn't even noticeable for Zac. Since he couldn't cultivate he instead spent most of his time pondering the Dao. He had been in multiple intense fights lately, and he felt close to improving multiple Daos.

He had gained multiple sources of insight to the Seed of Rot recently, and he felt that he might even push that Dao to the Peak soon enough. The biggest contributor was the skill he gained, but there was also the battle with the roach. Even the final axe from [Deforestation] felt slightly related to his Dao of Rot, though that axe seemed to be based on some higher Dao.

But as four days passed he unfortunately didn't manage to push any of his remaining Daos to the Peak. He did, however, feel that he made decent progress, and if he just got the opportunity to sit down and meditate in peace for a month or two he'd be able to evolve at least one of them. Of course, getting the chance to sit back and meditate with the current chaos was a distant dream.

The silent cultivation ended as the disk was starting to close in on Baoqui. Everyone looked back and forth across the horizon, hoping to find a glimpse of their people. But even if they were hundreds of meters in the air they could only see so far. They would likely only be able to spot the people if they were a few hours away at the most.

The environment around them was still barren though, with neither their own people or the undead in sight. They had spotted quite a few beasts during the past days though. They were even attacked a few times by flocks of supersized birds, but the disk possessed arrays that rebuffed them without a problem.

The fact that there was nothing to see was both good and bad. Good in the sense that there were no undead forces that had reached all this way so far. Bad in the sense that it started to become increasingly clear that Port Atwood's army hadn't gone in their direction after reaching Baoqui.

Zac was eventually forced to decide whether to take the risk of changing course or keep heading straight ahead. He tried to desperately listen to his gut, or rather his Luck, for any advice of what to do. But his mind was just a confusing mess. In the end, he chose to not risk it and kept the course.

A day later they finally reached Baoqui, but there was no sign of movement anywhere. This was not a surprise though, as half the town was completely obliterated, turned into dozens of massive craters. Somber expressions marred the faces of the group as Zac commanded the disc to land inside the town some distance from the destruction.

Bodies lined the streets, and there were signs of structural damage on the houses still standing. It didn't look like those who had died were warriors though, but rather civilians who were running for their lives. Zac shook his head as the group started walking south, and the group of Valkyries split off to scout the area for clues of their people.

What had transpired started to become increasingly clear as they reached the edge of the town. The town had been conquered by the undead some time ago, leaving no one of its original settlers alive. Then another battle had taken place more recently, where the second party was most likely his own people.

"Battle, pretty intense one," Ogras said with a somber face. "Real undead elites like the ones we fought during the beast waves."

"Our people?" Zac wanted to confirm as they stepped through the decimated wall into the battlefield outside.

"Some," Ogras eventually said as he pointed at two corpses. "Those two bodies are probably ours judging from their equipment. But most of these bodies died over a week ago, probably when this town fell. They likely became cannon fodder in a surprise attack against our army."

"At least there are not too many bodies," Zac said as they walked through the corpses, though he was sick to his stomach seeing over two hundred of his own lying on the ground.

There were over ten thousand corpses in the area, but it was clear that almost all of them were undead. Zac also spotted a few broken Unholy Beacons and over a dozen corpse golems who had fallen protecting them. It had been an intense battle, but one that his people won.

"I'm afraid it's not that simple," Ogras said with a shake of his head, not sharing Zac's optimism. "These are just the ones who didn't turn into zombies after dying. They all have wounds that are too grisly for them to successfully turn. The true number of casualties is likely far larger. Our people might collect bodies to not bolster the undead ranks, or they might have already been turned and joined our enemies."

Zac's heart was felt heavy as they looked through the carnage. Clues that Ogras was correct kept appearing. Broken weapons were everywhere, and they kept finding broken array disks. They even found large pieces of metallic shrapnel, and Zac recognized their origin. They came from the huge cannons that the Ishiate tinkers created.

But that was not the end of the surprises. Large pieces of wooden rubble turned out to be the remnants of multiple creator vessels, though Zac couldn't understand why his army would take out boats on dry

land. Only after a few seconds did they realize that Alea and Ilvere likely summoned them to use the offensive arrays. It was likely the Creator Vessels that were responsible for turning half the town into rubble.

Another large swathe of the battlefield was completely void of corpses, and even all vegetation was gone. It was a zone of death, and an acrid smell entered Zac's nose as they approached it.

"It's Alea, she was forced to go all out. We should not enter this area," Ogras commented with a frown.

"The tracks lead west," a voice shouted from the distance, coming from one of the Valkyries.

"We'll head out immediately," Zac said, urgency burning in his chest.

Until now he had forced himself to believe that everything might be fine, that his people were simply cut off but otherwise unharmed. But after seeing the town full of corpses he couldn't pretend any longer. Even worse was the knowledge that he would have made it in time to this battle if he left immediately rather than head to the Technocrat Incursion. The battle here had taken place two days ago at the most.

Even his decision to farm out his levels while waiting for his people to consolidate their hold over the Underworld Union felt like a shameful display of selfishness at this moment. He had to admit that his own priorities had somehow been eschewed ever since he entered the underworld.

His first instinct was to blame Smaug and his orchestrations to turn their attention toward the Union, but he knew that he himself was the one to blame in the end. He had become complacent after a series of victories, even though he had only closed some of the weakest incursions around. He had pushed back the closing of the incursions in favor of his own growth, not considering the constant threat the invaders were to the people of Earth.

The group stayed in Baoqui for less than ten minutes to gain a decent picture of what happened before they once again set out on the flying disk. This time they had no difficulty knowing which way to go since the passage of thousands of people left a clear track to follow. If that wasn't enough there was also a constant line of slain zombies strewn along the path like a trail of breadcrumbs.

The group had been mostly silent while rushing toward Baoqui, but after witnessing the aftermath of the desperate struggle the atmosphere on the disk had turned extremely oppressive. It was like a pressure cooker that threatened to explode at any moment.

The hours passed and they had soon enough flown for a whole day, but no one could sleep since they knew they were closing in on their people. The tracks looked fresh, and they started seeing groups of undead rushing in the same direction, seemingly trying to catch up.

An hour later they finally saw activity on the horizon, but no one in the group looked even a bit happy. The reason was simple. What entered their eyes was a vast battlefield, where a group of people desperately defended against two far larger swarms of enemies.

"Ready yourselves for battle," Zac said with grit teeth as days of accumulated bloodlust started to seep out of every pore of his being.