

The Fall 359

Chapter 359: Evil Stars

Zac wasn't actually in great condition after unleashing his three strongest attacks in short succession. He had used almost two thirds of his Cosmic Energy and his body hurt all over. The upgraded [Nature's Punishment] was responsible for the largest part of the cost, whereas [Deforestation] was the source of the strain.

He had barely managed to heal up his body while he traveled on the Flying Treasure, and using the first two swings of [Deforestation] had caused a few of his old wounds to open up again. But with his massive Vitality he would sooner or later get back in shape, and the pain wasn't something that would hinder him in dealing with some weak Zombies.

The fact that [Nature's Punishment] had reached Peak mastery had shocked him somewhat. It was the second skill to reach the apex, and Zac would have thought that he would evolve [Loamwalker] or [Axe Mastery] before he pushed that skill to peak mastery. He did use his movement skill almost constantly in his human form, whereas he had barely used [Nature's Punishment] more than ten times.

Truthfully he barely remembered jumping off from the Flying treasure. His wrath pushed through the roof upon seeing his significantly smaller army getting harassed, and yet it managed to increase even further when he saw Alea getting ambushed. He had barely managed to restrain himself from unleashing the third strike of [Deforestation] in his fury, instead opting to finish the elites with [Nature's Punishment].

Thinking about a skill reaching peak mastery made Zac remember that he hadn't actually tested [Chop] and its extra blade. So Zac finally started to curtail his churning emotions even though he just wanted to go crazy, and instead opted to see the capabilities of the skill. So he summoned [Chop] and grew a five-meter blade to clear out the area around him. The next moment the blade detached, and started to hover by him like a silent sentinel.

The zombies didn't care in the slightest about their fallen brethren, and they unhesitantly stepped over their corpses to get to the source of the life force. This forced Zac to keep summoning new blades and shoot them off into the zombie horde, each blade causing a tunnel of carnage before it ran out of steam. But he mainly focused on the permanent blade, and he was currently using it to constantly sweep the zombies that were lucky enough to survive the thinning out of his other blades.

He quickly realized that he could both choose to control the fractal edge by splitting his attention or to simply let it float in his proximity and attack any enemy that got close. His limit was roughly fifty-meters, and it was almost as quick as the blades he shot out like projectiles. If he wanted to he could have it spin around him at a rapid pace, killing anything that got too close.

But Zac eventually let it guard his back autonomously as he kept pushing through the Zombie horde. He didn't want to rely on the flying blade alone, as the battle caused his rage to resurface. He knew it was to a large part the splinter manipulating him, but he didn't care at the moment. He let the rage flow through him as he became a tool of slaughter.

Constant roars of the zombies echoed across the area as Zac flashed around with [Loamwalker]. Any time he appeared he would release a couple of blades with [Chop], each attack clearing out over a

hundred Zombies. He wouldn't immediately leave though, but instead launch a furious assault with [Verun's Bite] at melee range at all the surviving zombies in the area.

He was long covered in bile and rotten flesh, but he didn't care. He just kept swinging his axe, not thinking, not feeling. He didn't know how long he fought or how many Zombies he killed, but he finally stumbled, realizing he was running dangerously low on Cosmic Energy.

"You once asked me to remind you that you were becoming a bit murderous. I think this would count. Got it out of your system?" a voice reached him from the side when he finally slowed down his rampage.

Zac blinked and took a look around, and found that Ogras had appeared amongst a clump of shadows. There were still Zombies around, but it could no longer be called a horde. There were rather islands of zombies in a sea of destroyed bodies, with perhaps 10% of the original number remaining.

"I did all this?" Zac muttered with some confusion.

"Don't flatter yourself. We took care of more than half of them while you went on your rampage," Ogras snorted. "But you seemed disinclined to cooperate so we stayed out of your path."

"Let the others deal with the remainders. Some people still have some fight left, and these things give a decent amount of Cosmic Energy and money for the recruits. Don't hog it all for yourself," Ogras said with a smile.

Just as Ogras spoke he spotted a familiar figure effortlessly fighting against a clump of a few hundred undead. Kenzie was killing them at an impressive speed as she shot out various skills at a rapid pace. Each skill seemed to be quite basic and something that cost next to no Cosmic Energy, yet the elite zombies kept falling to never stand up again. At her current pace she would need less than a minute to clear the pack.

"It's quite odd," Ogras muttered as he followed Zac's gaze.

"What is?" Zac asked, afraid that the perceptive demon had found a clue of Jeeves.

"It's hard to explain," the demon hesitantly said. "But her fighting style is odd."

"Odd how?" Zac asked as he looked at his sister downing one zombie after another.

It was efficient, but nothing too impressive to be honest. He would personally be able to turn that whole pack to goop with two swings of his axe.

"Don't you see the flow? She is never in danger. It almost looks like the undead are cooperating with her, trying to get themselves killed," Ogras said with some incredulity.

Zac initially didn't understand what Ogras was talking about, but he almost immediately got an explanation of what the demon meant. While Kenzie was focusing on the zombies ahead of her with a flurry of attacks two more undead tried to rush her from behind. She didn't even look back though, and carelessly waved her hand above her head, shooting out two small fireballs toward them.

The aim of the first spell was perfect and it hit one of the zombies straight in its throat, but the other one was unfortunately aimed toward the ground, and wouldn't be able to do any damage. But just as Zac considered throwing a rock to kill the other attacker something shocking happened.

The first zombie fell backward from the attack, felling the second one who was a few steps behind. Both the undead fell down on the ground, and the unharmed zombie coincidentally fell into a position where the second fireball hit it straight in its head. The two struggled for a while, but Zac could sense that the fireballs were infused with the Seed of Tinder, and there was no way they would survive.

The remaining zombies ahead were soon killed by Kenzie's real attacks, and she moved on without giving the two zombies behind a single look. It all looked like a great coincidence things worked out, but Zac knew better than to believe that. It was no doubt Jeeves who helped her out.

At least he hoped that was all it did. If it was actually taking control of her it was a whole different issue. It was something that had bothered him ever since they fought the cyborg. Jeeves and whatever was planted inside the foreman might have come from the same people, and they had no idea if there were some failsafes in the AI that would turn Kenzie into a monster.

"Do you see what I mean?" Ogras said as he slowly shook his head, clearly having a hard time believing what he just witnessed. "That girl is another type of monster. What kind of scary woman was your mom to give birth to evil stars like the two of you?"

"Well, Kenzie was always the smart one," Zac coughed, not sure how he would lie his way out of that one. "I guess she got pretty good at fighting zombies during her time at the Dead Zone."

Kenzie noticed the attention soon enough and stopped her onslaught, instead opting to walk over to the two.

"Are you ok?" she said with worry in her eyes. "I'm sure Alea will be fine. I bet she will be back on her feet by the time we get back to Port Atwood with these people."

"I'm ok," Zac smiled, but he wasn't sure how he really felt.

His rage had subsided after exhausting himself against the zombies, but he was choked up by a feeling of impotency. There were too many things to do, and it felt like he was spread so thin that he would fall apart. Worse yet was that his people kept dying and there wasn't much he could do about it.

"How are the rest?" Zac finally asked, even though he was afraid of the answer. "How many did we lose?"

"Half," Ogras sighed. "Just above half of the people who set out from Port Atwood are still alive. Most of the casualties happened two days ago, but there were constant losses during their escape."

"Half," Zac numbly repeated.

"The good news is that our fighting capabilities haven't decreased nearly as much," Ogras said. "Most of the casualties were the recruits and the non-combat classes. Only 12 of your Valkyries and 17 of the demon warriors died. And you know that the most effective way to get stronger is by pushing oneself beyond one's limits. The survivors can no longer be considered recruits, they are a true army now."

"Still," Zac sighed. "Thousands of our people have died. And for what? The Undead Empire didn't even lose a general, and their horde is currently on its way to finishing the array."

"People fall against the invaders every minute all around the globe," Kenzie said with a shake of her head. "We can't let it weigh us down. We do what we can and the cards will fall where they will. It's not your duty to save the world alone, we're all in this together."

Zac looked with surprise at his sister, not expecting such a viewpoint from her. He would have thought she would be even more broken up about it, as many of those who fell were people that Kenzie socialized with during her stay at the Academy. Meanwhile Zac hadn't even met most of them.

But he soon realized that while Kenzie hadn't battled nearly as much as himself she might have lost even more. He knew she had been forced to witness one person after another dying around her. First the Tutorial where less than half survived, then being dropped off right next to the Dead Zone.

She never spoke much about her time there, but her occasional comments had pictured a pretty bleak existence even before that old dog started to lust after her. Most of the friends she had made the last year had already died. Zac was much better off in that regard. He hadn't really lost anything so far, which might be why these deaths felt so heavy on his shoulders.

"We'll let everyone rest for 8 hours," Zac said, changing the heavy subject. "After that we'll change course and head for Erdenet."

The army of Port Atwood hadn't known about the much closer teleportation station owned by the Sino-Indian Alliance, and they were currently heading for an array that was weeks away. Zac couldn't spend that much time protecting the army, so he would change course. The return trip would still take over twice as long as it did while he zapped here on his flying treasure.

He didn't have the time to divert his attention too long, and he needed to get back to closing Incursions. Whittling down millions of low-leveled zombies was a waste of his time, and his strength was better spent on putting out the other fires on Earth that others were unable to deal with.

Ogras and Zac went back to the army, but Kenzie wanted to help out with cleaning out the remaining undead in the area so she stuck around. When the Port Atwood Army heard that they finally would be able to rest most of them simply crumbled down on the cold ground, not even bothering to take out anything to sleep on.

In just seconds snores echoed across the area, while a small group kept watch in all directions. Normally there would also be a group responsible for looting the army, but the zombies carried nothing of value. Zac and Ogras stayed in the middle of the army, each taking out a few crystals to regain their spent Cosmic Energy as quickly as possible.

"That was in the nick of time," a rough voice came from close-by, and Zac opened his eyes to see Ilvere and Janos walk over.