

The Fall 370

Chapter 370: Array Towers

Most people looked relieved to hear that Zac would take care of the array towers. Charging those things was to risk one's life without the potential for any gains in levels, so they breathed out in relief when they heard they didn't have to do that. However, Joanna and Emily looked worried when they heard that he would charge into that deathtrap alone.

"You'll handle them?" the Murk said with barely contained skepticism. "Do you have any of your old world weaponry, like tanks? How about I contact the other forces? They might be able to help us."

"It's fine," Zac said with a shake of his head before he turned to Verana. "Where's Smaug?"

"He's hiding amongst the rearguard," the beast mistress leered. "He scurried back there the moment he saw the towers."

Zac snorted and walked back to the end of the convoy, and he soon enough found the person he was looking for.

"I have decided I will defend the rear for you, lord," Smaug immediately said when he saw Zac approach, emitting the aura of a brave warrior. "I am afraid I will just be in the way in such cramped quarters. My arrays cannot distinguish between friend and foe. It is truly a shame, but I will pray for your success as I will defend your backs with my life."

"Isn't that nice," Zac snorted. "Don't worry, I won't make you go to the frontlines. That's not why I brought you here. Do you have any more of those concussive arrays?"

"I can buy five right now, at 20 million each," Smaug said with some relief in his eyes.

Zac sighed, but he nodded in agreement as he transferred the funds.

The concussive arrays were something that Smaug had procured while they fought the Underworld incursions. They were array crystals that essentially functioned as superpowered hand grenades. They caused a tremendous explosion in a somewhat contained area, and the arrays were great at utterly destroying fixed structures.

They weren't as efficient at taking down actual cultivators though, as they had a small delay that would allow most to move out of the way or activate their defenses. But they would be perfect for taking down a couple of towers each in case things went out of control.

"So you're really doing this thing?" Smaug hesitantly said as he looked at the rows and rows of tower arrays. "These golems aren't messing around, and I don't think that the turrets they've built will be anything to laugh at."

"I have enough cards up my sleeve to feel confident I'll survive for a while at least, and if it turns out to be too dangerous I'll back off," Zac sighed. "I can't send my people into such an obvious trap. They're not strong enough."

"It's not just fun and games to be on the top is it?" Smaug snorted. "At least you're also on the top of the Power ladder as well so people don't try to rob you every two days."

Zac could only let out a deep sigh in agreement as he walked away. It had been a bit odd to reacquaint himself with Smaug during the trip, as this excursion was the first time they met while he was in his human form. He had pulled out all the stops to ingratiate himself with Zac, doing everything from providing arrays from his limited license, to updating him on rumors or valuable deposits, to even trying to set him up with a few ladies.

His over the top enthusiasm was a bit hard to swallow, but it truly is difficult to punch a smiling face.

After he got the arrays he simply sat down on his prayer mat. It actually kept him cool even in this environment, and it allowed him to smoothly wait out the three hours until the agreed-upon time. The only interruption was that Murk confirmed that the other sides of the pillar were normal, but the closest tunnels had all been closed down or filled with lave.

It had elicited a short discussion about whether they should spend two days or so to head to the closest open tunnels instead of walking into this obvious trap. Zac Eventually decided that they would stay the course. The Golems had the means to close down the tunnels, and he didn't want to waste two days only to find that their new point of ingress had been closed as well.

A few daring scouts had dared to test out the pillars on the edges, and not surprisingly the towers were fire attuned. They all shot out balls of lava that were roughly the size of a soccer ball, and they both possessed kinetic force and fiery heat. The only upside was that it almost looked like they were dropped from the top of the tower rather than being shot, so their speed wasn't troubling.

The real trouble came from the fact that one tower could shoot out quite a few fireballs in a volley every five seconds, and there were over a hundred towers. If their army entered together they would be assaulted by a thousand lava balls in no time, and such an attack would cause massive losses.

The time finally arrived, and Zac hadn't figured out any better strategy than running straight in. He would take down the towers one by one without stopping, allowing him to avoid as many of the lava balls as possible.

A rain of fire from the sky almost completely blotted out the ceiling to welcome his arrival. They looked like fiery drops of rain, slamming down all around him. Zac blanked out for a second by the majestic sight, but he shook his head to snap out of it. He immediately appeared in front of the nearest tower with the help of [Loamwalker] and swung a large fractal edge toward the base. The blade was already imbued with his new and improved Seed of Sharpness, and it cut through the pillar without any trouble.

Unfortunately, that was it. The pillar still stood in the same position, as Zac's swing hadn't actually managed to move it at all. He could only take a few steps back and infuse himself with the Dao of heaviness as he tried to topple the thing over with a body slam. However, the collision must have looked like an ant trying to topple a tree, and Zac only managed to make the tower shudder a bit.

He could only summon a couple of more fractal blades and launch them at the tower as he danced around like a monkey to avoid the increasing amount of lava balls landing all around him. It was not exactly how he wanted to present himself, but it was the best he could do without wasting a huge amount of Cosmic Energy. Each blade was infused with the seed of heaviness this time, and the attacks slammed into the tower with the force of a truck.

The base was already completely cut through, so the attacks were enough to topple it without any problem. Zac's eyes lit up when he saw that he was able to destroy a tower without much effort, and he hoped that taking down the first tower would have a cascading effect. The towers were clustered quite close to each other, and he pushed it over in the direction of its closest neighbor.

But a shocking change took place the moment the tower started to topple. It lost all its structural integrity in an instant, and it quickly turned into a tube of lava that spilled down straight toward a gaping Zac. Even he didn't want to take a magma bath unless necessary, even though he was pretty sure he could withstand it for a second or two without getting seriously hurt. He flashed away with [Loamwalker] toward the next pillar instead, leaving a large pond of lava in his wake.

After the first experiment he started to get a hang of it, and the second tower only needed three quick swings with the help of his Dao Seeds and [Chop]. But the intensity of the lava balls only increased as he got within range of more and more towers, and he quickly became unable to dodge them all without being forced out of the entrance.

He was forced to bear the brunt of some of the attacks if he wanted to keep going, so he activated [Nature's Barrier] to block the handful of the lava balls dropped in his directions. Leaves were obviously not the greatest defense against fire, but with the help of the Dao of Trees they had an unyielding vitality that allowed them to knock the balls away before burning up.

However, as more and more hits struck his defense he realized that he would waste even more Cosmic Energy this way than if he simply unleashed a greater strike. After a short deliberation the energy around him started to surge, and the enormous forester's hatchet appeared behind him. His body strained under the pressure, but a wave of destruction rippled outward causing one tower after another to fall apart into pools of magma.

What better attack to destroy what looked like a bunch of stone trees than [Deforestation]?

The first swing of [Deforestation] was all he needed, as it destroyed over half the towers. He had already taken down around ten before that, and the big gap gave him a breather from the relentless bombardment of lava projectiles. There was no need to use his second swing for the remainders as he saw it. He instead threw out a couple of boulders to avoid stepping in lava and threw out his concussive arrays at the tightest clumps of towers.

Lava kept raining down from the falling towers, but the threat was dealt with thanks to his [Axe of Felling]. What remained was to simply take down the final towers with his Daos, and it only took a few minutes of his time. Zac signaled the army it was fine to move forward after the final tower collapsed, and they quickly sped toward him as they vigilantly kept watch for any remnant defenses.

But it appeared that there were no hidden arrays, among the obvious towers, and the only remnant threat was the massive amount of magma that filled the whole entrance.

The army seemed to have anticipated this though, and the stronger warriors threw out one huge block of stone after another, effectively creating a wide bridge to pass. Zac nodded in appreciation as he jumped up on the bridge from one of his boulders, and the army entered the true Incursion together.

A pillar of the purest flames entered their sight the moment they stepped inside the cave where the golems had built their base. Zac first thought it was the volcano that the Council mentioned, but he soon

realized it was the Incursion pillar itself, and it showed just how closely related to flames these golems were.

The other Incursions he had encountered had generally been simply color-coded to match the force, apart from the Undead Empire who had turned the pillar into a beacon of Miasma, where specters slowly circulated the beam.

The flame golems seemed to have the ability to do the same thing, as the Incursion was a huge red flame that almost blinded Zac when he looked at it. He swiftly turned his eyes away, a bit leery about whether the sight meant the golems were powerful enough to enjoy special treatment, or that it just looked that way because all the golems were fire-attuned.

Such musings would have to wait for later though, as he knew that they needed to act quickly. They hadn't spotted a single golem so far, which made Zac believe an ambush was just around the corner. Besides, his new allies were currently fighting the Golems according to Murk's report, and the longer it took for Zac to take down the leader the greater the losses would be among the Council's armies.

The group kept rushing closer and closer toward the Incursion Pillar, but they didn't see any structures anywhere. However, the inside of the enormous stone pillar was still a marvelous sight. These golems were not only insidious combatants who had no compunctions about drowning people in magma, but they were also great artisans.

The golems had for some reason decided to spend a massive amount of effort on thousands of sculptures, each of them a lifelike masterpiece. The motifs were almost always of nature, with everything from large trees to unfamiliar creatures lovingly carved out of transported stones, or even out of the ground itself. The only exception was a huge boulder placed on a hill in the distance, the only stone that looked completely untouched.

Most people thought it was some sort of art, but Zac immediately knew something was wrong, as the boulder actually made him feel threatened.