

The Fall 371

Chapter 371: The Floor is Lava

Since the suspicious boulder was placed alone on a hill it immediately garnered the attention of the others as well, and many exchanged glances in confusion.

"Did they just found a rock they really liked...?" Joanna muttered, seeming a bit discombobulated from the unexpected scenery around them.

But Zac didn't agree as he trusted his instinct on this matter.

"It's dangerous," Zac succinctly said shot out five fractal blades in rapid succession.

His hunch proved spot on because the large boulder suddenly burst into flames as it transformed into an enormous amalgamation of fire and rock. The stone split into around twenty pieces that made up its body and limbs. The golem reached over five meters in the air, and the air for tens of meters around it shuddered from the heat and power it radiated.

Lava seeped out between the cracks in the stone, and it slowly dripped on the ground. Mysterious fractals also appeared on the stones and the inscriptions shone with a red glimmer that contained obvious power.

"This is what the golems look like?" Emily muttered in disbelief from behind. "I don't want to fight those things. I'll get torched before even getting close."

"No!" Murk shouted with fear. "This one is way bigger than the ones we've encountered, and the normal ones aren't covered in fractals."

"It's a common cultivation method for golems," Verana said. "They inscribe their bodies with Cosmic Pathways to allow energy to flow more naturally. This one is one of the generals, or more likely the leader itself."

"I'll test it out," Zac muttered as he glared at the enemy from the distance. "Give me a power boost."

Emily nodded and she threw a burning axe into his back. Zac felt like lava coursed through his veins before the effect stabilized. He chose the axe that gave Strength and Dexterity since he wanted to finish that thing as quickly as possible. Between his own prowess and Emily's boost he didn't fear the golem even if it radiated a greater pressure than even the Demon Lord did.

He disappeared in an instant, and a row of cracks in the ground was the only clue of his path as he rushed forward with the help of his movement skill. He was right in front of the golem in less than a second, and he felt a scorching heat from the Golem's Dao Field. He felt his skin smarting after just a second, but he breathed out in relief as he guessed that the golem didn't seem to possess a fragment.

The effect of the Dao field was only slightly stronger than his own Peak fields, where the extra boost came from the golem being in E-Grade. He immediately released a Dao Field containing heaviness, which hopefully would restrain his enemy a bit.

The golem was expecting Zac's arrival, and its huge fist looked like a small sun as it soared toward him. Zac immediately summoned a fractal edge and imbued it with Heaviness, opting to clash with the enemy

head-on. The clash caused a storm of fire to explode far into the sky, but Zac imbued his body with the Seed of Trees to recover from the small burns.

Cracks appeared in the ground as the Golem stumbled a few steps backward from the initial clash, and Zac immediately knew that the golem had around 700 Strength at best. It would be an insurmountable power for most people, but Zac's effective strength was over a thousand between his high-grade titles and Emily's boost.

The edge from [Chop] detached itself from [Verun's Bite] and Zac controlled his blade to harass the golem from behind, as he mounted another assault from the front. The golem lit up in a blaze of flames in response, and the fractals on its chest started to emit an even stronger red light than before.

The already huge creature suddenly grew to twice its size, and Zac sensed real danger from it. He managed to cut off a large chunk of rock from its leg with a few furious swings as it transformed, but it wasn't enough to interrupt the transformation. The intensity of flames around it had increased by at least a tier, and Zac was forced to dismiss his independent fractal edge.

The blazing heat from the Golem King's body caused constant strain on the blade, and Zac was forced to infuse it with a huge amount of Cosmic Energy if he wanted to keep it going. It was more economical to use [Chop] to create disposable blades that only lasted one swing. Zac realized that the transformation had caused the golem's flames to increase in intensity, but Zac was still overpowering it in raw strength.

Chunks of rock kept falling as Zac systematically dismantled it, stoically enduring the accumulating burns on his body. The Golem King furiously tried all kinds of attacks to take Zac out, but it wasn't strong enough to crush him and the Seed of Trees kept restoring Zac's burns. It released a deep bellow and slammed both its huge fists downward. Zac didn't want to block such a swing without reason, so he quickly jumped up to avoid the strike, aiming a strike at its head.

The two fists cause a massive earthquake in the area, but Zac managed to cut off a decent chunk of one of its shoulders. But a sense of worry crept into Zac's heart as the rumblings didn't abate, but only got worse. Zac finally realized what was going on, and he turned to the people who were keeping a defensive perimeter in the distance.

"RUN!"

Pandemonium arrived a second later, as an endless amount of lava spewed up from the ground, creating a tidal wave that crashed in the direction of Port Atwood's Forces. It pushed forward with shocking speed, rapidly closing in on the fleeing warriors. Was the Golem trying to retaliate by killing his people?

Zac grit his teeth in fury as he jumped at the golem to launch another mighty swing, but the creature countered with another punch with its barn door-sized fist. Gravel rained down along the slope from a huge jagged wound that ran all the way along the Golem's arm, but Zac was in turn launched away like a rocket from the eruption of fire the fist released.

A plume of smoke made a streak through the air as Zac was thrown back almost a hundred meters, but he landed on his feet without an issue. He made no attempts to run back up the hill, and instead opted to run back toward his fleeing army. Getting thrown back was just Zac borrowing the golem's momentum, as the huge thing wouldn't be able to push him if he didn't allow it.

He used [Loamwalker] to the limit to get back in time, but the distance between his forces and the huge wave of lava kept shrinking. He knew that if that wave hit there would be serious casualties, as far from all of them were equipped to resist an attack of that magnitude.

But he was one with the earth as his steps took him closer and closer to the wave, and he finally caught up. The wave was simply massive by this point, and it shone with an almost blinding light. But Zac didn't hesitate as he started running on top of the malleable magma, ignoring the pain of his bare soles.

Smoke sizzled from his feet causing his eyes to tear up from the pain, but Zac only kept running. Unfortunately bad turned to worse when he realized he was starting to sink, even with his tremendous speed. In just two seconds he was already to his knees, and he started to sink faster and faster. The lava felt like quicksand, and the pain was quickly becoming unbearable.

The fractals on his robe lit up with a beautiful glimmer, but Zac had no time to admire the defensive charge his gear contained as he hurriedly pushed through the lava. Even with the protection of his top-quality gear he was still subject to tremendous heat, and he felt like a lobster getting boiled alive.

His legs strained as he waded through the viscous magma until he finally broke out on the other side, and his eyes were met with the scene of a few Valkyries desperately erecting defensive shields with the help of their War Array. Zac shook his head as he immediately realized such a wall would not hold against what he just forced his way through, and he took out an item from his Cosmos Sack with a sigh.

A refreshing scent spread across the area as Zac spread out across the area as he had activated his Dao Field for the Dao of Trees, and the next moment a miraculous sight took place. An impossibly dense jumble of thorned brambles spread out for over two hundred meters in an instant, and they grew to twice the height of the sea of lava.

It was [Bramble Wall], the second ace in his repertoire that he found during the hunt. He had already used his [Void Ball] against the Cyborg, but he had kept this item all this time since it was an item of protection rather than destruction.

This was the choice he made. He could have likely destroyed the Golem King if he was given another minute, but that would have cost the lives of a large group of his own people. He had already cut off a third of its volume, and he couldn't imagine that didn't count as a grievous wound. But Zac had forcibly resisted the whispers of malice in his mind and literally ran through fire to protect his people.

Unfortunately it was all too obvious that a wall of brambles wasn't the optimal defense against lava, and Zac could see how the vegetation was slowly getting decimated even though the brambles rapidly regrew with shocking ferocity. Zac scrambled for ideas and quickly tried to infuse the roots with the Dao of Trees.

It gave no response, even though the two concepts should have matched. He could only try the Seed of Sanctuary as well since he was out of options. This time it actually worked, and the roots lit up with a slightly golden hue, making them slightly fire-resistant. The spread and effect of his Dao Seed were far greater than he expected, and an idea formed in his mind that he quickly confirmed.

Sanctuary (Peak): Endurance +50, Intelligence +20, Wisdom +50.

It was another mid-fight breakthrough. The past weeks had made him better realize the duty of a leader, and his decision to give up his own goal for the safety of his people inadvertently helped him push through the final step. He was already close to evolving the seed due to the two iterations of Dao Visions, but this fight gave him the final push.

The bramble wall was still getting scorched by the sea of lava, but the roots managed to last far longer with the help of the Dao of Sanctuary. It even slowly gained thickness due to the regrowth. Zac breathed out in relief, knowing that his army was safe for now.

"How can we help?" Joanna asked from behind.

"I think the Golem King used a skill that was massively empowered by the environment. We'll just wait it out. Have people move back just in case," Zac said before he jumped up on the wall of brambles to see what was going on.

The Golem lord still stood in the distance, and it looked like it was infusing power into the ground, making it spew out more and more magma like a real volcano. Zac frowned at the scene, knowing that their time was limited. The bramble would only keep regenerating new roots for twenty or thirty more seconds, while the Golem King seemed to just be getting started.

"Throw your [Extinguishing Arrays] over the wall! Buy me a couple of seconds!" Zac shouted as energy started to surge in his forearm.

The huge fractal hand emerged and shot toward the golem with blinding speed. The creature immediately noticed the new threat, and a large fractal appeared in the air behind it. Out of the fractal a white-hot flame emerged, and it actually appeared to be alive as it took a slightly humanoid shape, forming a head and two fanged arms.

"An elemental!" Verana shouted with some surprise. "Is that thing a Summoner?"

Zac frowned as he looked at the inscribed hand who was suddenly beset by a barrage of flame attacks of the elemental. His own hand started to blister and crack from the transmitted heat, but he grit his teeth as he flooded [Nature's Punishment] with the Seed of Trees, allowing it to continuously regenerate its burnt parts.

It finally managed to arrive above the elemental and Golem who still kept infusing the ground with energy. The large fractal beneath the hand appeared next, just like it did during the battle against the undead. But no mountain emerged from the fractal, but something else entirely.

It was instead an endless torrent of water that spewed out of the fractal, making it look like the other end of the array was at the bottom of an ocean.