

The Fall 372

Chapter 372: Deluge

An unceasing deluge of water rushed out of the array in the sky, crashing into everything below in an instant. This was the true power of reaching peak mastery of [Nature's Punishment]. Nature took many shapes and forms, and the earth was just one of them. Another type of punishment of nature was the relentless waves on the ocean, crushing anything in its path.

Just like the Golem King had his ocean of fire, so did Zac have an ocean of his own.

The elemental had summoned an enormous wall of flames to block out the water, and the clash of the two opposing forces caused thick clouds of steam to spread for kilometers in every direction. Some of the water also spilled over on the sea of lava, which helped to cool it down somewhat. Zac's vision was completely blocked out in just a second, so he could only keep pouring energy into his skill to keep it going while maintaining vigilance for surprise attacks through the haze.

Zac was starting to worry that his bramble wall would crumble before he finished the fight, but a high-pitched shriek echoed across the cave after ten seconds or so. The wail caused Zac's mind to blur for a second and almost made him fall off the wall of brambles. But luckily he had learned his lesson after encountering the mental bell, and he had kept [Mental Fortress] active and fully charged during the whole battle.

It only took an instant for him to once again stabilize his mind, and he sensed a stream of Cosmic Energy entering his body. Something had been killed by his attack, and Zac guessed it was the elemental judging from the shriek. However, the surge of energy only felt like one kill, and Zac guessed that the Golem King was still alive. Eventually he couldn't maintain his skill any longer, and the torrential downpour ended.

The problem was that he couldn't see anything past a few meters ahead due to the massive amount of mist in the air. He hadn't really thought about this problem when he decided to attack with water, he simply wanted to cool down the lava and extinguish the burning Golem. But the Golem could be anywhere at this moment, as the Elemental staved off the water for almost ten seconds, giving the Golem ample time to move out of the way.

An attack could come from anywhere as things stood.

"Stay together, shout out if you sense something!" Zac shouted to the people below.

It at least became apparent that the golem no longer was infusing energy into the ground to pour out more lava, as the moving wall of molten stone had stopped, and large parts had already cooled down enough for it to become solid again. Zac briefly considered running back on top of the lava to scout out the area, but he soon enough gave up that idea.

The Golem had already shown its willingness to target his army, and he needed to be close-by in case it was preparing another assault.

"Do you have any means to sense where the golem is?" Zac asked Verana who stood next to him.

"I'm afraid not," Verana said with a shake of her head. "I think it's best to simply wait a few minutes for the haze to disperse before deciding what to do next."

Zac had to reluctantly agree, even though it felt like giving the enemy time to prepare their next attack. After two minutes the bramble wall started to rapidly disintegrate, rotting with a speed visible to the naked eye. It wasn't Zac that was doing anything, but it was likely just the natural life cycle of that odd plant. It rapidly grew for a few minutes before its life ended.

Another ten minutes passed where Zac vigilantly walked around the army as a guard, trying to find any clues in the slowly dispersing mist. Every minute that went by made his nerves even more frayed, and his mind even started to play tricks on him. Every small movement in the shadows soon enough felt like a hidden ambush by the golems, and he had to restrain himself from launching fractal edges in all directions.

But no attack appeared, and when the mist finally dispersed they only saw a desolate landscape devoid of a single Golem. Zac was a bit confused, as it felt like the golems missed the perfect opportunity to strike back. After going over his options he ordered the army to resume their approach toward the core of the Incursion.

But the group only walked for one minute when he got a prompt from the System, telling him that the Incursion was closed. That could only mean that the Golem Lord had died or that he had left through the nexus hub. The news quickly spread among the people since the Valkyries still had their quest for a few more days, and they noticed that their quest progress had advanced by one.

"The whole invasion has probably left already," Verana guessed as they kept moving toward the Incursion with greater speed. "The moment that golem realized how strong you were it launched its ultimate attack at us, wanting to create an opportunity to escape."

"They weren't even willing to properly fight it out? Things might have become different if the Golem brought helpers and some arrays;" Zac said with confusion. "This approach feels a bit different from how the other invaders have reacted. They usually go a bit further."

"Golems don't think like us. They generally don't have emotions, and concepts like honor or revenge are foreign to them. They likely made a calculation that the risks of staying outweighed the potential reward, and immediately left," Verana guessed.

Zac could only shake his head in disbelief, feeling like he had been robbed of a proper conclusion. These golems really left a sour taste in one's mouth, causing so much trouble for Earth but not having the decency to allow the natives to retaliate.

Verana's suspicions were soon enough confirmed when they saw the harried armies of the Council arriving from the other directions as they converged around the Nexus Hub. It turned out that the golem armies had entered a heated struggle against the Council's armies, contesting every single meter. The golems even held the advantage, but they suddenly fled with shocking speed, only leaving a token force behind to curtail the advance of the Council.

Every single golem that stayed behind fought to its death, even going so far as to detonate themselves in a final attempt to delay the army. Zac realized it was all to let as many as possible flee through the

Nexus Hub, and he was speechless at learning they golems were just as ruthless against themselves as they were against others.

He had never encountered a force that would leave behind a tenth of their people like that, and that those people would fight with such rabid ferocity. Perhaps only forces who reared death sworn warriors could do something like that and trust in the results of the rearguard.

Another unfortunate result of the extreme decisiveness of the Golems was that the whole area around the Nexus Hub was completely picked clean. It was just a flat surface, and it looked like the golems had even taken their houses with them as they left through the Hub. There were no stores of resources, no gear or weaponry to loot, nothing.

Even Zac who had fought two pretty taxing battles couldn't properly rest and go over the battle, and he started to run around to look for valuables with the rest of the party. He already had a sour taste in his mouth after not being able to kill the Golem King, and that only got worse when he realized he might be losing a bunch of money on the venture.

But Joanna finally came over with some good news after a few minutes.

"They've found something," Joanna said as she walked up to Zac.

"What?" Zac said with bright eyes, hoping to make at least some money from the Incursion.

"Tunnels, lots of them," Joanna said, making Zac blankly look at her.

What was so special about a bunch of tunnels?

Murk came over as well, and when he heard their exchange and Zac's subsequent confusion he immediately explained the situation.

"The underworld is surprisingly flat, with its elevation only diverging a few hundred meters at most. The most common exception seems to be mines containing spiritual-grade resources," he excitedly explained. "And we've already found indicators what this place holds!"

"So what resources are there?" Zac asked as he got infected by the moleman's exuberance.

"It's a Nexus Crystal Mine!" the moleman said with a wide grin.

"Oh," Zac said, his excitement noticeably waning.

He already had his own Crystal Mine on the island. Port Atwood also gained another 6 mines in the Underworld, though they were far worse than his original mine since they didn't sit right on top of a Nexus Vein.

"You don't understand," Murk said with almost glowing eyes. "I've never seen a mine of this size. Our early estimates say it covers the whole area beneath the pillar, perhaps reaching even further. But that's not the most important thing!"

Zac curiously looked on as the moleman took out a raw Nexus crystals shining with scorching radiance.

"Attuned Crystal? E-Grade?" Zac whistled with surprise. "You think there are more?"

“We only found the one so far, a scout accidentally cracked a small boulder and found this one inside. But if there is one crystal like this, then there are surely more. This might be the greatest mine in the Underworld,” the moleman said, almost dancing in place.

Zac nodded in agreement, feeling it made sense the golems were placed here considering their attunement. But he also remembered that the golems only kept to themselves during the start since the integration. Had they mined everything already?

“Don’t worry,” Murk said when he saw Zac’s hesitation “The Council got their hands on a measuring array that detects spiritual resources, and it’s indicating there are still vast resources remaining as long as we go a bit further into the mines. The crystals that were easiest to access might be gone already, but not even the Golems could take it all in a couple of months. Besides, the crystals will regrow.”

“I want a detailed survey as soon as possible,” Zac said, his heart finally starting to thump with excitement.

He knew he had gotten his hand on a huge treasure this time, and he wanted to get a feeling of just how huge it was. E-Grade Fire-Attuned Nexus Crystals weren’t that rare in the multiverse, and even his Top Grade Beast Crystals were worth more.

But the whole Beast Crystal mine would fit in a small side-tunnel of the massive network beneath their feet. There were only 200 top-grade Beast Crystals, but there might be tens of thousands of attuned Nexus Crystals in his newly acquired mine. And with a mine of this magnitude there might even be the possibility of D-Grade crystals appearing in the bottom, or at least in the future as Earth matured.

“We’d be happy to explore the mine together with you in the upcoming weeks,” the moleman quickly said, his whiskers shuddering with excitement. “Our people can provide both insight and efficiency to any mining operation.”

Zac only smiled in response, making no decisions on the spot. The Council had already agreed that the Incursion and its surrounding area would fall under his control, but the council would gain a 15% stake in any wealth from this place due to their assistance. The size of the stake had been the largest point of contention in the meeting a few days ago, but Zac ended the discussion with a simple fact. If they had the capability they would have long closed the Incursion themselves.

But the Council could still boost their income even further if they were the ones who did all the work since no one would work for free. He would have to check with one of his administrators if Port Atwood could handle such a massive venture themselves.

“Did we find any stores of already mined crystals? Like a store-room by the entrance of the mine?” Zac asked as an afterthought.

“None, and we’ve gone so far as to frisk the people who entered the mines to make sure they’re not hiding anything,” Joanna said. “I think the golems already found out about the fate of the other Incursions, and they already had one foot out the door before we even arrived. The Golem Lord simply tested your power, and when he noticed your strength he immediately gave the order to return.”

Zac sighed and nodded, feeling that what she said made sense. The golems had time for an orderly evacuation, so it was no surprise that they would also have taken their things. Still, the mine alone was a

huge get, though it was unlikely he would be able to extract anything too valuable before he left for the Tower.

The Councillors were already closing in on him from the distance, no doubt hoping to renegotiate the deal after finding out about the riches below. Zac could only smile at their approach, feeling that they only had themselves to blame for the situation. The Council had so many powerhouses, yet they hadn't closed a single Incursion. They were too tame, and consequently they were unaware that great riches could always be found close to the Incursions.

Zac was a bit wrung dry from the fight though, and he was in no mood for a haggling session. He simply threw out a couple of arrays on the ground and told Joanna that he needed to rest after the fight. The Valkyrie nodded and moved to intercept the Councilors, immediately shutting down any attempts to discuss the mine.

The array disks isolated the small space from the hubbub outside, and Zac sat down on the ground after making sure that none of the Councillors were brazen enough to push through his arrays. It was true that he needed to recuperate after the fight, and he took out an E-Grade Nexus Crystal.

But the real reason was that he wanted to go over his other gains.