

The Fall 392

Chapter 392: Emerald Skies

Reoluv was inwardly fuming, but he still had to retain a dignified expression as he received the many congratulations from the various young masters and ladies from distinguished forces as he exited the tower.

Passing the 62nd level was respectable, but not what he had aimed for. His goal had always been to completely conquer the 7th floor, just like his master did once upon a time. But a small mistake had abruptly caused the end of his trial, even before he had used up his final hidden cards. It was just the difference of one level from completing the whole 7th floor, but that 1 level was like an endless abyss.

It was the divide between a talented cultivator and a genius of an era.

The conquering the seventh floor have given him a shot at making contact with the hidden peak forces presiding over the sector, or perhaps provided him with the same sort of opportunity that presented itself for Lord Beradan a few decades after he managed to conquer the 7th floor.

Winning the favor of an undying existence passing by their remote sector would elevate his fate to a level that not even becoming an Emperor could match.

But it was all for naught.

It felt like a cosmic joke, a brief lapse in concentration made his token crack, which forcibly teleported him outside even though he still was able to keep fighting. He didn't even know that was possible, since the tokens were essentially impervious to outside forces. Or did that change at the high-tier floors?

Reoluv grit his teeth at the memory and quickly excused himself from the square full of people, citing the need to go home and ponder on a few insights he gained from conjuring the Eight Calamities Titan.

The truth was that the mental shock of falling short for such a stupid reason had even made him unable to completely immerse himself in the effect of the Apparition, but perhaps the situation was still salvageable if he hurried home to his master's Dao Chamber. As long as he managed to push one of his fragments to Medium Mastery the tower wouldn't be a complete wash.

Many impressed sighs and comments echoed across the square, praising such a genius that never let himself relax. But he didn't care as he crushed the token even though he could stay here for another month if he wanted to.

At least there was one small comfort in this disappointing climb. There was at least no one in the area who would be able to beat his score in the short run, and he would have another chance in a few years.

"My Lord, it is done," Triv said as his miasmic body shuddered with excitement.

"Oh?" Adriel said with some surprise. "I thought it would take a few more days."

"We managed to sneak a handful of spectral squads behind their lines to place the final flags. They will start to corrode the environment though, so it will be found out within a week that something is wrong," the ghost attendant confirmed.

"You don't need to explain to me," Adriel snorted. "I was the one who modified them."

"My apologies!" Tviv hurriedly said.

Adriel waved his hand that it didn't matter as he thoughtfully stared at his crystal for a few seconds.

"Have we found out the source of undeath yet?" Adriel asked. "Those closed incursions teemed with miasma, but I couldn't recognize its signature. I first thought it was Mhal who had somehow resurrected, but he was much too stupid to orchestrate something like that."

"No, we sent a group to greet and possibly integrate the person who closed those incursions, but we were always too late," Triv said. "We also tried to compare the residual energies to everyone here, but we couldn't match it either."

It shouldn't be possible that it was one of his children. Adriel had never heard of a newly turned citizen ignoring the commands of its leader. Even those ignorant things scuttling around his domain would respond to the calling, shuffling toward him without hesitation. Had the undead warrior mutated to allow him to somehow resist it?

"There is something else," the attendant added. "He can use the natives' teleportation arrays. The scouts believe that the warrior is an unaffiliated wanderer since he didn't respond to the call in the slightest."

"So he's not a designated invader at least," Adriel muttered as he started to pace back and forth. "Unaffiliated wanderer at F or early E-Grade? A twist of fate? Or is a scion of the ancient clans bored enough to visit a baby planet?"

"If it's one of those young masters who have gained an interest in this world... Should we back off?" Triv Nervously asked.

"No need. If such a personage wanted this planet they would simply visit me and claim it. That would be a pretty good outcome as well. A family that can see through the obscurity of the heavens wouldn't be stingy with their compensation for claiming a world," Adriel smiled.

However, Adriel's instincts told him that the mysterious warrior was not some scion of an ancient clan. He was just a Lich rather than one of the five blessed races, but he was representing the Empire in this invasion. Even one of the purebloods would have had to respond to the call since it contained the authority of the Primo.

"Of course, there's another possibility," the Lich pondered.

"What?" Triv asked with confusion. "If not a turned citizen, and not an unaffiliated wanderer, then what?"

"It might be related to the Mystic Realm," Adriel muttered with a thoughtful smile. "We know it's an abandoned research facility of the heretics of the Boundless Path. Did the Technocrats perhaps create a

synthetic bloodline disconnected from the Call of the Empire? But why would they do that? Immortality?"

"What do you wish us to do, my Lord?" Triv asked hesitantly, knowing the far more knowledgeable lich was simply asking rhetorically.

"Leave it be," Adriel finally said. "We'll ignore that man for now since he hasn't shown any hostility against us. Perhaps activating the array might prompt him to visit me for a talk."

"So we're finally liberating this world?" Triv said with excitement. "We'll finally be able to breathe again!"

"We have played passively long enough," Adriel agreed as two green sinister lights lit up in his eyes. "Those humans and ants think our citizens are just targets to farm levels? It's time for them to join my kingdom."

"Miss Marshall, it's bad!" Trevor screamed as he almost fell on the ground in his frantic entrance of the command tent.

"What's going on?" Thea said with a bad premonition as she immediately ran out of the tent, and one glance was all that she needed to know what scared Trevor so badly.

The sky was green.

Enormous azure lines crisscrossed a murky-green sky and the air was rife with miasma. Worse yet, she saw almost a dozen azure pillars reaching toward the sky in various directions. They looked a lot like incursion pillars, though death-attuned rather than the blue one she had encountered during the battle with the Incursion neighboring Westfort.

But a second look helped Thea understand that the pillars weren't Incursions, but rather a part of the massive array that the undead had worked on for the past months. They connected with some sort of unseen ceiling a thousand meters in the air, infusing the azure lines with a continuous stream with energy.

Had they failed? But they had held all up until now, sacrificing tens of thousands of lives!

"Shit, I thought we had more time?" Mark said with a grunt as he walked out of the tent as well. "This is beyond what I can deal with, miss. What do you want to do?"

Thea's mind was blank as she looked at the pillar closest to them. What did she want to do? How should she know? A year ago she was simply running a small non-profit that rescued stray animals, mostly with the help of her family's vast wealth. She knew nothing about warfare and leadership.

"I..." Thea stammered, her mind trying to grasp for a solution.

It was one thing talking about an array powerful enough to turn Earth into a world of death, but it was a whole other thing seeing it in person. How could they stop it? Or at least delay it? This was not something a swift stab with [Petalstorm] could solve.

"Take a breath," Mark said as he saw her face. "You are not alone in this. You have both the family and the whole planet with you."

Thea took a steadying breath to calm herself, and she started to go over the situation they found themselves in.

"According to Zac it would still take a week or so for the array to truly activate even after it was completed. It seems that those pillars are dragging energy out of the ground, converts it to dense miasma, and finally funnels it to the inscription lines in the sky," she analyzed. "Perhaps we can slow down the charge-up by stopping the flow of energy?"

It wasn't a solution, but it was the first step, helping the following steps to come easier. Just a minute later a group of scouts set out from their camp, guarded by elites decked in a terrifying number of weapons. They would spare no expense to reach the closest pillar to study it and relay images back to the command center.

Meanwhile, their army would launch a massive assault at the undead horde to make sure they didn't veer off toward the pillars to defend it.

But things quickly deteriorated as the scouts got close to the pillar, as all of them zombifying with a speed visible to the naked eye. Thea and the other commanders could only helplessly look at the monitors as their party ripped each other to shreds. The scouting party didn't even manage to get closer than a few hundred meters before they were turned.

What was even scarier was that there was no sign of miasma entering their bodies or any complaints of discomfort from the poor men. The change came abruptly and without any warning.

"We can try launching rockets at the pillars, but our munitions aren't enough to target all of these things. Besides, I fear that this issue cannot be solved with our mundane weaponry. If that was the case the undead wouldn't have left most of the pillars unguarded," Mark said with a sigh.

"Do it, we must try everything," Thea said with a bleak expression. "I'll head to Port Atwood to see if anything can be done on that end."

"We can only pray that man will choose to put his private plans on hold to help deal with this mess."

"Do you have any ideas?" MacKenzie asked, desperately trying to mask the fear taking hold of her heart as she looked up at the pillar in the distance.

This wasn't in line with what they had learned so far. They should have had up to a month at the most, but at least a week before this happened. But it was hard to refute the pillar reaching into the sky.

Their appearance had caused everything to go awry, and with both Zac and Ogras gone people didn't know who to turn to for answers. People keep looking at her, and she understood the fear and question in their eyes. They were wondering where her brother was. Zac and Ogras weren't slated to return for a few days though, and there was no way for her to contact them.

"We can't even get close," Ilvere sighed with a shake of his head. "Anything that gets within a few hundred meters of that thing will be turned into a zombie in a heartbeat, and its domain seems to be

spreading. We even tried taping a bunch of divine crystals on a Barghest, but the crystals simply cracked and the barghest was turned as well."

"I know," Kenzie sighed. "Thea Marshall visited me a half an hour ago looking for Zac. She looked like she would explode when I explained that Zac was off-world. My hopes of getting a sister-in-law keep getting dimmer. Anyway, it looks like we will need to take down those pillars from a distance."

"That lassie will wake up from her sleep sooner or later," Ilvere smiled before returning to business. "Destroying the array flags will be quite difficult. They are dug far into the ground, making a direct assault from distance extremely troublesome. You would have to destroy the whole area to get to the array, but we don't possess such force."

"Not necessarily," Kenzie said as she took out her brother's flying treasure.

"Wait, what are you planning?" the demon general asked with worry. "If Lord Atwood returns to find you turned into a zombie he will skin us alive."

"I'll be fine," Kenzie said as she stepped onto the flying disk.

Ilvere groaned when he saw that she wouldn't change her mind, and jumped onto the disk with some resignation. Soon enough the two were soaring through the skies toward a pillar at the outer edge of the green canopy. It only took them half an hour to reach it, and the demon sighed in relief when he saw that it was completely unguarded. At least they wouldn't have to deal with the undead elites.

Then again, the pillar itself was scary enough to keep everyone at bay.

"So what are you thinking, young miss?" Ilvere said as he hesitantly looked at the pillar a kilometer away.

"I have been working on something my brother left me the past week," Kenzie said. "I think it will be helpful against the pillars."

"Powerful offensive arrays?" Ilvere said as his eyes lit up. "That might work, but it needs to be a really powerful one. The pillars are also protected by a shield. Your old world weaponry didn't work on them according to the report we just got from the human armies."

"Perhaps not, but what about new-world weaponry?" Kenzie smiled as she released a swarm of newly manufactured drones from her Cosmos Sack.

She knew that her brother would freak out when he learned that she set up the whole production line just hours after he left, rather than slowly study them for any latent risks. But she was tired of just sitting by on the side while people were getting killed, and Jeeves had no problems hacking the things.

An army of weaponized drones was a perfect counter against the sea of undead as Kenzie saw it. They were mostly immune to the corrosive effects of miasma, and even if they fell they wouldn't convert into new zombies.

The drones flew out with shocking speed and in just a minute they had formed a circle around the pillar. Each of them was only a meter in height, and they didn't emit even a speck of Cosmic Energy. But Kenzie had great confidence in her children, and she made some final adjustments to their position with the help of her AI.

“Wha-“ Ilvere said with wide eyes as he gazed at the unfamiliar machines with confusion.

But his questions got stuck in his throat as the flying machines no larger than a child each released a beam of terrifying energy straight at the foot of the pillar. When the two managed to open their eyes again only a smoldering crater remained.