

The Fall 400

Chapter 400: The Law of the Land

The problem was that Zac's connection to the Peak Family wasn't all that deep. It was simply a chance encounter between himself and Greatest. Perhaps they would have lent a helping hand if it was before, but now he had a bulls-eye on his back due to the quest.

It was one thing for them to stand up against a solitary D-Grade warrior, but another thing entirely to create enmity with all the forces in the Base Town in order to protect him.

"We'll just have to play it by the ear. In case we get split up later, remember to stay until the time runs out, so that we all exit this place at the same time," Ogras said as he walked over to Galau. "Get up, there's no time to waste."

"You are from a recently integrated planet so you don't understand just how troublesome people you've offended. We need to figure out a way to make amends!" Galau said as he finally dragged himself back to his feet.

"We won't apologize to those assholes. Why was it so hard for them to sell one puny healing treasure?" Ogras snorted. "I say good riddance. Seeing how they acted they would just have caused problems for us even if we cowered in their presence. Might as well be proactive and kill them first."

Zac nodded in agreement. He wouldn't have acted the way he did if it wasn't for the Splinter in his mind, but he was pretty annoyed even without it. That guy wanted Alea to die out of pure spite, even though they had never met before. All because some unverified clue that he had some connections to the Thayer Consortia.

"Anyway, let's get going," Zac said after throwing the demon a nod in thanks for the support. "How do we get to the next floor?"

Galau looked at Zac incredulously, obviously shocked at how uninformed he was. Ogras wasn't as surprised of course, as he was the source of everything Zac knew about the tower.

"The Tower contains various challenges, and which challenge you will encounter at a specific floor varies. The only way to completely prepare for a climb is to be good at everything, which is of course impossible," the demon said.

"Challenges? Like what?" Zac asked with interest.

Zac hadn't actually bothered to learn too much about the tower itself until now. He had been so consumed with finding all the things he needed for himself, Earth, and Alea in the Base Town. Ogras had already mentioned that you could brute-force your way through the tower, but he needed to know how things worked now.

Besides, it wasn't like Ogras was a wellspring of information. Getting anything out of the demon when it didn't benefit him was like squeezing water out of a rock.

"It can be anything. It can be passing an array, like you did at the Pill House, finding a treasure, identifying the source of a curse, saving someone," Ogras explained and listed a handful of other challenges the demon himself encountered.

Zac frowned since his skillset was quite limited. He had a basic understanding of arrays, but that was about it. How the hell would he dispel a curse or complete a summoning ritual for a departed ancestor? He knew nothing about pill concoction, tracking, or any other of the myriad side occupations in existence.

“Don’t worry, The Ruthless Heaven’s always leaves a path of survival,” Ogras smiled. “There is a second option, one that suits you better.”

“Oh?” Zac perked up.

“Just blast through everything. Might over technique,” the demon grinned. “There is always the option to just kill something instead of completing the quest. It might sometimes be a bit unclear just what needs to be killed though, so make sure you think it through before you start swinging. Killing the wrong person might have odd consequences.”

Zac sighed in relief. It was just like the System to provide a back-up solution like that, it truly preferred violence over shrewdness.

The three finally got ready to leave the glade they wound up in, and Zac put the headless corpse of Rasuliel into his Cosmos Sack after some deliberation. Perhaps it would come in handy for some reason when they emerged from the tower.

“By the way, what was the reward?” Zac suddenly asked with some morbid curiosity as they walked. “What was my life worth?”

“One free level.”

“One free level? That’s it?” Zac asked incredulously, and he even started to feel a bit insulted by the System.

“That’s a huge reward!” Galau said. “I’ve never heard of such a big reward before at Base Town. It’s usually things like clue crystals that provide hints on how to complete a single quest, but yours is simply one free level.”

“Oh, so a level for the tower? Still, what’s the big deal if you get to one level higher?” Zac asked.

“Because it might allow you to completely skip the final challenge of a floor. Over 90% of all trail takers get stuck at the final challenge of a floorsince the difficulty is way higher there than the earlier levels. Blasting past that trial will get you fame, rewards, and a better title,” Ogras explained. “Just look at Reoluv. If he managed to kill you first he would reach the fabled 8th floor rather than being stuck on 7th. It's the difference between once a decade genius and once a millennia genius. I’d be tempted to take you on right now myself if you weren’t such a monster.”

Zac only rolled his eyes in response, but he suddenly realized that Ogras wasn’t just messing around. The demon was subtly telling him that the quest was still active. And while Galau felt like a slightly hapless youngster he wouldn’t be here unless he was an elite.

It wasn’t unthinkable that Galau would try to kill him sooner or later, as that would not only let him pass another level, but it might also allow him to survive the storm that was no doubt brewing outside the tower. If Galau presented his head to the Zethaya or Tsarun Clans he might even get a huge reward.

“Well, thank you for your restraint,” Zac quickly answered, adding half-jokingly. “I guess I will have to sleep with one eye open.”

The three walked through the tranquil forest for the better part of an hour, and interestingly there wasn't a single predator in sight. He did spot a level 20 bird, but it was pretty small and kept a wide berth from the three.

This was of course fine with Zac who was in no fighting condition at the moment, but it was a bit confusing for someone who had been primed to fight some peak F-Grade boss to complete a trial. Zac was just about to ask what was going on when the scenery changed.

The forest gave way to cultivated farmland that stretched out across the horizon, and a small farming village could be seen in the distance. The whole scene felt extremely calm and idyllic, but Zac was dragged out of his reverie by a prompt from the System.

[The Village of Whittlecreek of the Bravorian Kingdom has lately been subject to an increasing number of raids from Fallen Goblins. Find out the source of the new threat.]

“Did you get the prompt about Whittlecreek as well?” Zac asked curiously.

“Yes, this is our first trial,” Ogras said as he pointed at the pastoral village in the distance. “I guess it can be categorized under information gathering. Let's head over to the town first.”

“Is there anything else I should know?” Zac said. “The people in the town, for example. Are they real?”

“That's a subject of some debate,” Galau said, finally getting into the spirit of adventure. “Some believe these people are real, but others say there are simply illusions or lifelike puppets created by the System. They do all give Cosmic Energy when killed though, which give more credence to the first theory.”

“The Ruthless Heavens can simply provide energy itself though,” Ogras interjected.

Zac nodded in agreement, remembering how the System had provided Cosmic Energy for destroying robots back at the Technocrat Incursion.

“That's true,” Galau nodded, before turning back to Zac. “The reason that a large group believes these are just puppets is that they simply ignore all comments about the Tower or the world outside. It doesn't matter what you do or say, these villagers will truly believe they are from Whittlecreek in the Bravorian Kingdom.”

“The people are also never surprised to see or hostile against other races, like they don't even know that a huge golem or a humanoid fish is standing in front of them. The villagers would still welcome Mr. Azh'Rodum even if the quest was to rebuff enemy demons,” Galau added.

Ogras had introduced himself using the name of the demon town on his island rather than his true last name even before they entered the tower, and Zac guessed he had done the same when prompted by the system. The demon still didn't want any clues about his situation leaking back to the demon hordes in case it would bring trouble to either his grandfather or Earth.

There was also the issue of Karmic threads and other troublesome skills. Not using your true name wasn't a foolproof plan, but it did make various types of information gathering slightly harder. That's

was another reason Zac chose to use his alias as well, apart from sending out a hidden signal to his mother in case she was listening.

“So how would we normally complete a trial like this?” Zac asked.

“This is the very first level, so it should be possible to complete quickly,” Ogras said. “I would guess that there is a clue in the town itself that would allow us to complete the trial, or at least give us a clear hint of where to go.”

“But that’s the hard way, what about defeating the guardian or whatever?” Zac asked.

“The guardian would probably be the boss of the Fallen Goblins, and we would no doubt find out where he is soon after entering the town,” Ogras said. “Completing the normal way would be to find out why the Goblin tribe moved here. My guess is that a rival Country is trying to weaken them by tricking these vermin to raid the farmlands.”

Zac looked over at the talkative demon with surprise. It sounded like he had thought everything through, and already formulated a plan. He even seemed to have an in-depth understanding of the mechanics of the tower itself, which allowed him to infer hidden clues.

“Don’t look at me like that,” Ogras said with a roll of his eyes. “Remember, I was a lot weaker last time I was here. I wasn’t even level 60, so I focused on gathering intelligence rather than fighting. The guy I hired was a bit of a meathead, so I had to help out where I could.”

“What?” Galau blurted out. “Why would you head here so early?”

“I was bored,” Ogras shrugged, clearly not interested in divulging his precarious situation back in his old clan.

Zac kept asking questions as they walked over toward the town, and Ogras simply told him to play the part. It made things easier if you inserted you into the setting in a believable way. In this case they would say they were warriors who had come to look into the newly emerging threat. That way the villagers might be more inclined to share information with them.

He also underlined that they shouldn't attack random people. It could quickly make things get out of hand. For example, it might garner the ire of some nearby nobleman of the Bravorian Kingdom who would rush to the village for revenge, and such an individual wasn't necessarily within the expected strength of the floor they were on. Many climbs had ended early due to cultivators taking too large liberties while inside, where they took the opportunity to act despicable while out of prying eyes.

After all, no one would ever know what happened during a climb unless they retold the story themselves.

“But why would the System design such an elaborate place like this?” Zac asked. “Why not just present a series of increasingly strong opponents for us to fight? This place must cost an insane amount of energy to keep running.”

“Have you heard about the origins of the System?” Galau asked.

“Of course, the Limitless Empire created it to nurture warriors for their war,” Zac said.

"Exactly. The System has changed a lot since that ancient era, but its main prerogative remains. It needs to create powerful warriors. You shouldn't see this place simply as a trial to get a good title, but as a training ground to hone your skills," Galau explained. "Everyone who comes to the Tower is an elite the System has deemed worth nurturing, and this whole place is a massive incubator."

"And I am not talking about your Skills or your Dao. This place teaches you to think," the youth added. "That's what I believe, anyway."

"What do you mean?" Zac asked with confusion.

"You can look at it this way. Most people who come here are from established factions. They might have good insights and high attributes, but they have lived generally sheltered lives under the protection of their elders. I have no doubt that you as a progenitor have seen far more battle than almost any warrior you encountered in the Base Town," Galau said.

Zac nodded, feeling it made sense. There was no reason for a clan to throw their youths to the wolves to grow like he did. It might create one or two powerhouses, but most would end up dead. Almost no one was willing to rear their young generations like that.

But that also meant that they turned out like Average, people having the technique but not the grit to make it through a harsh battle.

"It seems you understand. The Tower throws you into a large number of unfamiliar situations, allowing you to gain not just experience in fighting, but also how to solve various types of situations you might encounter in the future. The things you learn today might save your life in a Mystic Realm in the future," Galau finished.

Some excitement started to well up in Zac's heart as he listened to Galau's explanations, and he couldn't help but look forward to the trials now.

Until now there had only been a fight for survival, where he was thrown into one perilous situation after another. Now he could relax and enjoy some exploration and adventure, all while honing his skills.

It was nice to finally get a breather.