

## The Fall 403

### Chapter 403: Questing

Zac slowly nodded. It was messing with his head a bit not knowing whether everything around him was real or not. From what he had heard so far it was both and neither. He also briefly wondered if his high Luck stat would skew the ratio of real to fake items in his favor. Perhaps he would walk out of here an extremely rich man.

Or perhaps the System would decide Zac hadn't suffered enough turned all his items illusory.

"Things here also have their own pricing. Sometimes a precious item might only cost a tenth of what it cost outside. You can take a gamble and buy it, and you might make a fortune when you exit," Ogras added.

"Is there any way to discern what's real and what's fake?" Zac asked with interest.

"Nope, not that I know of at least," Ogras said with a shrug. "Perhaps some factions know of a method, but why would they share such a thing with the masses? Oh, the rewards from completing a floor are always real as well."

"Eat it," Galau burped from the side, drawing a confused look from Zac.

"If you find something useful it's best to use it immediately if you can. Everything is real while you're still inside the Tower. The Ruthless Heavens will not reach into your belly to pull the item out," the demon said.

Zac nodded in understanding as he ordered a huge dinner. He wasn't in a rush to head to the tower since Ogras was happy idling about Galau seemed intent on finding the bottom of the barrel. There was still some time remaining on his weakened state brought on by [Hatchetman's Rage] anyhow, and the nasty wound in his side still pained him.

"I think I found the clue, by the way," Zac said as he gorged himself on a huge flank steak.

"Oh?" Ogras said, clearly disinterested.

Zac sighed at the lackluster response, but he still carried on and explained the situation with the tower.

"Sounds like that's it," Ogras nodded after hearing the description. "We can head there after finishing things on this end."

That was fine with Zac as having walked around the town had caused his wounds to flare up again. Taking it easy while he recuperated was just what he needed. The three only set out two hours later, at which point Ogras was forced to carry Galau who had drank himself into oblivion.

As expected of the first level they didn't encounter any trouble finding their target. It was the only building on the desolate mountain, and it rose almost a hundred meters into the air. Along with the guidance of Zac's Automatic Map they found the place in no time.

The demon threw the still-sleeping Galau on the ground and showered him with water from one of his canteens, making him wake up with a sputter. The scene made the demon snicker before he started to scout the area.

“There’s no one here,” Ogras said as he looked around. “That wizard guy you mentioned is probably long gone.”

Zac nodded and the three walked inside the dilapidated tower. Nothing seemed to be out of place. In fact, the place was pretty much picked clean, and the only residents seemed to have been a bear and a bunch of birds judging by the droppings everywhere.

The base floor contained a couple of side-rooms holding nothing, and the only path led upward. Zac immediately headed for the stairs, but he only got a few meters before he was stopped.

“Wait,” Galau spoke up and pointed at a dark corner. “There’s an array hiding a set of stairs leading downward.”

“How do you know?” Zac asked curiously.

He liked to believe that he had some attainments in spotting arrays after his time trapped during the hunt, but he hadn’t noticed anything out of the ordinary at all. That a depressed and still half-drunk merchant managed to find something he missed was a bit humbling.

“I have a pretty decent inspection skill,” Galau conceded. “I mainly got it to help me discern whether items I wanted to buy were fake, but it sometimes comes handy in other situations.”

Zac nodded in understanding and the three walked down, their descent spearheaded by Ogras. The demon would have to do most of the heavy lifting while Zac was on the mend, but it shouldn’t matter on the beginner floors.

The area at the foot of the stairs was in a lot better state than the levels upstairs that were pretty much reclaimed by nature at this point. The dust was swept away, and it looked like someone had lived here recently. There were both bedding and a table with some scribbled notes, but Zac couldn’t read it.

No one was there though, meaning the wizard or whoever the children had seen had likely left some time ago. The three only needed to look around for a minute before Ogras found a hidden passage, and they proceeded even further down to find a hidden chamber that was directly cut into the mountain foundation.

There was only one item in the room, a golden crown lying on a pedestal. The crown seemed to be a bit small for a human’s head, but what was most concerning about it was that a black mist that formed hazy fractals slowly swiveled around it. It might be a spirit tool, or the fractals might be a defensive array inscribed into the pedestal.

“It seems to be a cursed object,” Galau said with a frown as he looked at the crown. “We might be abl-.”

However, he didn’t get any further as a cannonball slammed into the crown with enough force to almost tear a crack in space. It was Zac who scouted out the thing in his customary manner. A loud snap could be heard before a distant wail entered their ears.

A sinister aura spread across the room, but it was quickly crushed when Zac unleashed his Dao Field from his Seed of Trees. The sinister atmosphere only lasted for a second before the basement returned to its original state.

The metal ball had completely crushed the treasure and the pedestal it lay on. The fractals were forcibly broken as well. Galau looked at the scene of destruction mutely, before he slowly turned to Zac with an incredulous expression. The demon sighed from the side, but he didn't comment.

"I... I was about to say that we might be able to cleanse the item, allowing us to take it with us. If it turns out it's a real treasure we might have been able to make some money..." Galau said with a wry smile.

Zac coughed with some embarrassment, feeling he had committed a rookie mistake. He even opened up his wounds in his eagerness to help out, which made him feel doubly stupid.

"Well, it's just some random trinket at the first level," Ogras shrugged. "Even if it turned out to be real it would be worth a pittance at best."

Zac nodded in agreement, before looking around in curiosity.

"What now? Do we need to kill the Goblins as well?" Zac asked.

Ogras was about to speak when a hidden door suddenly slid open in the wall opposite them, showcasing a lit hall inside. The three immediately walked inside and found a platform that looked just like the entrance to the tower itself.

"Is that it?" Zac asked, and he couldn't help but feel some disappointment at the lack of excitement.

"The first floor is essentially a tutorial floor," Ogras smiled. "Anyone who has gained the requirements to receive a token should have no trouble completing it. Almost half of all climbers finish the second floor as well."

"Then why the carries if it is so easy?" Zac asked.

"The problem comes from the third floor," Galau explained. "The final level is especially tough for the average elite. Many are willing to buy the carry just for that trial alone. A few might have been able to complete it themselves if they went all-out, but they would rather pay a few billion to guarantee a reward and the better title."

Zac nodded in understanding and the three stepped up on the platform, and it immediately started to hum into life. He looked back toward the stairs they came from, and it was a bit unsettling knowing that the whole world he had just visited might just cease to exist since it had fulfilled its purpose.

The next moment he found himself sitting by a table in a rowdy tavern, with Ogras and Galau joining him. The other customers were almost all some sort of beastkin, resembling panthers a bit with their golden eyes and black fur. The occasional humans and elf-like humanoids could be seen as well though, meaning the place they found themselves in wasn't completely homogenous.

Most of the beastkin seemed like warriors rather than the farmers in the last floor, and pretty much everyone was decked in armors and some manner of weaponry. A few of them almost looked like a walking arsenal as they were covered in daggers, swords, and anything sharp they could carry.

Even though they looked pretty ferocious Zac still sensed they weren't too strong, perhaps around level 50 or so at best. He would personally place them at the same strength as the Valkyries. Zac guessed they actually wouldn't meet any peak F-Grade warriors until they reached the final level of the first floor after having seen the average strength of the first two levels.

[The Kingdom of Eyrvar has launched a quest to clear out the Fungal Depths of Lake Varia. Claim the riches in the depths before the mercenaries or the Royal Army.]

"Lucky," Ogras said with a whistle. "A treasure quest."

"How's that lucky?" Zac asked with confusion. "Aren't most of the treasures fake anyway?"

"Well, yes. But if you snatch a whole hoard of items, then chances are that at least one or two of them is real," the demon explained.

"It seems we're not the only ones after the treasures though," Galau whispered as he listened in on the conversations on the neighboring tables.

"Excuse me," Ogras said as he walked over to the table next over with a large cask of the local liquor he bought from a waiter. "We just arrived to the area and heard about the quest. Mind if I ask you a few questions?"

"Sit down, lad," the mercenary said, his eyes peeled on the jug of liquor.

"Why did the kingdom give suddenly give such an order?" Ogras said, feigning interest.

"The depths are crawling with those goddamn monstrous crustaceans. They would rather waste our lives than their own in clearing it out," one of the men said with a snort. "Rumors are there is an evolved alpha leading the swarm."

"Crustaceans? Like big lobsters?" Ogras asked with confusion.

"More like crabs," the mercenary explained. "Nasty pincers and sharp legs. Pretty smart too."

"So why are there so many taking up the quest if it's so dangerous?" the demon probed.

"The pearls," another man said after taking a huge swig. "It's no secret in this area so I might as well tell you. Some clams produce magical pearls in the lakes at the bottom of the caverns. Those pearls can be used to prolong your lifespan. Each pearl is worth a pretty penny, and you can keep what you find according to the kingdom."

"I see, thank you. We will have to think about if we're ready for something like before heading down," Ogras nodded 'thoughtfully' as he turned towards Zac's table. "Oh, by the way, when will people start the mission?"

"Tomorrow," a beastman burped. "That's why we're getting drunk today."

"Let's go," Ogras said with a loud voice to Zac and Galau. "We are behind these people. We need to gather provisions and weaponry if we want to join tomorrow."

His words elicited a couple of guffaws from the beastkin who kept drinking contentedly. Zac and Ogras followed the demon out of the tavern, and they found themselves in the docks of an alien port city. A

few enormous ships were anchored a few hundred meters out to sea, and dozens of smaller vessels could be seen sailing back and forth.

A constant bustle was taking place with people coming ashore or embarking, even though it was the dead of night. Zac whistled with appreciation as he looked around. Was this what Port Atwood would look like when it advanced? He had been afraid that the use of naval ships would decrease as people became stronger, but perhaps that wasn't necessarily the case.

"What gear would we need for something like this?" Zac asked with some confusion as he turned to Ogras. "Doesn't sound too complicated."

"Of course we don't need to gather gear from some shabby store here," Ogras snorted. "I just wanted to head out immediately without arousing suspicion. Do you want to let those animals get their paws on our pearls?"

"It could be some basic specimens of [Longevity Clams] they were talking about," Galau added thoughtfully. "Their pearls can be used in concocting pills that improve longevity just like he said. Each pearl is worth millions on the outside. Tens of millions if their quality is good enough. We'll make a great profit if even a handful of the pearls are real. We're pretty lucky to get a scenario like this."

"Lucky, yeah..." Ogras said as he shot Zac a pointed look.