

The Fall 478

Chapter 478: Fighting Fate

The air screamed around Zac as he shot toward the azure shield with the speed of an airplane, and even he got a bit worried he was playing a bit fast and loose with his life. However, he threw any hesitation into the back of his mind as he conjured a fractal blade that was as large as himself. He was perfectly capable of making it even larger, but he needed to contain the impact to a smaller area.

The blade first changed color to a gleaming silver as he imbued it with the Fragment of the Axe, but the sanguine glow quickly spread from [Verun's Bite] as well to cover the whole fractal edge. This was the most power he could release without utilizing [Hatchetman's Rage] or the slumbering remnants, and he could only pray that it was enough to punch a hole in the massive array.

The world froze as Zac's attack cut into the shield with all the power he could muster, but an enormous shockwave that dispersed the clouds of miasma soon followed. Hairline cracks spread for hundreds of meters in each direction, and Zac managed to squeeze through the hole in the barrier before it healed.

However, the point of impact was over 100 meters into the air and he had no means to control his descent. The collision had also caused him to completely lose balance, and any hopes of a hero's entrance were dashed as he slammed into the ground face-first. Another shockwave, this one a lot smaller, spread out from the point of impact, instantly killing the closest zombies. He scrambled back to his feet while wiping away some of the blood running down his nose, and he took stock of the situation.

The insides of the array were shrouded by dense swirls of miasmic haze, and his skin crawled from the contact with the condensed death-attuned energies. The extremely limited sight made it impossible to see any clear threat to Port Atwood, and instantly getting mobbed by enraged elite zombies didn't make things easier to discern.

Fractal blades shot out in each direction as swathes of destruction were carved into the undead hordes. However, these were the best of the zombies as the fractal blades were whittled down before they reached too far. Each strike still killed over fifty zombies, but the blade broke apart from a storm of counterstrikes after that.

Zac activated [Cosmic Gaze] in hopes of making anything out, but everything became a haze varying degrees of grey. However, he did spot spots with more condensed energies, and he immediately shot toward the closest target.

A few seconds later he found himself in front of an Unholy Beacon, and Zac wasn't surprised by the sight at all. What did make him frown in consternation, however, was the array surrounding it. There hadn't been anything like that around the beacons he had seen until now, and he guessed it was some sort of secondary array that was powered by the beacon.

The beacon was guarded by a hulking Corpse Golem that immediately swung at Zac the moment he appeared. However, Zac's physique was beyond monstrous by now, with an effective strength reaching 2500. Zac countered the punch with his own, his fist not even a tenth the size of the massive undead construct.

A thundering explosion echoed out as the arm of the golem blew apart from the force, and it was cut in two the next second as Zac slashed it with a lazy swing as he stepped toward the beacon. He couldn't make out its purpose, so Zac simply cut a few lines to ruin the inscriptions before he ripped the beacon out of the ground and stashed it in his Spatial Ring.

Zac was a moving calamity as he moved from beacon to beacon at his utmost speed, and he had stolen ten beacons in less than three minutes. Some of them had launched massive outbursts of death-attuned energies at him though, but Zac had managed to dodge the waves of death with the help of [Loamwalker].

One of them had actually detonated just as he was about to stow it away, but the vibrant energies of the Fragment of the Bodhi were able to neutralize the attack. He still hadn't spotted any leaders though, so he could only keep going in hopes that they would be forced to show their hand sooner or later.

A large shudder echoed out when he ripped another beacon out of the ground, and he saw that the shield finally flickered before it dissipated.

It had been pretty smashed by his tremendous momentum when he launched himself at it, but it had soon healed itself after he pushed his way through. But now it looked like Zac had caused too much destruction within the shield, to the point that it could no longer maintain its functionality. The highly condensed Miasma started within the barrier to spread out as well, but Zac knew that it would sooner or later be cleansed by the pure energies of the world.

However, his confusion only grew while looking around as visibility steadily grew better. He couldn't see any high-grade siege tools or anything else that would separate the thousands of zombies from normal elites. But he finally spotted a group of hooded beings in the back of the army, guarded by five hulking E-Grade Corpse Golems.

Zac immediately rushed toward them, carving a line of true death through the zombie horde. The hooded warriors didn't react to his approach, but the golems readied themselves for battle and started rushing toward him. However, these golems were only marginally stronger than those who had guarded the Unholy Beacons, and Zac needed less than a minute to turn them into small hills of rock-hard flesh.

The hooded warriors had started fleeing but he effortlessly captured one of them while blocking the escape of the others. It tried to struggle out of his grasp, but Zac was surprised to find that it was pitifully weak.

"What are you planning?" Zac growled with anger as he ripped the hood from the lich's head.

However, what met Zac's gaze wasn't the Lich King or one of his generals, but just some random revenants that couldn't have been higher than Level 60. Zac immediately crushed its neck in frustration before he captured the others, getting the same results.

Just what was going on?

It quickly became apparent that this was all a big diversion, and that the undead wasn't actually interested in conquering Azh'Rodum. But what was the point of sacrificing their own without any gain? Was it to trick the Church of the Everlasting Dao? Or was the real mission taking place somewhere else?

Zac's first thought was the mines, just like how Harvath had guessed. Were they trying to mess with his Nexus Vein somehow? If the real leaders had entered the confusing mess of subterranean tunnels beneath the island it would be extremely annoying to root them out, as his own force still hadn't completely mapped the high endless number of narrow passageways that ran beneath the surface.

However, he suddenly saw someone running toward him, decimating all the zombies that tried to impede her path with a barrage of attacks based on the four elements. Zac immediately flashed over to Kenzie, who immediately threw herself in his arms. He really wanted to catch up and hear what had happened since he left, but he saw how frazzled she had looked as she ran toward him.

Something was wrong.

"Are you okay?" Zac asked. "What's going on?"

"I am fine, but someone is tampering with the arrays in the valley since some time ago!" Kenzie said with worry as she released him. "I stationed a few sentries on the mountain just in case, but I can't get a hold of them now with the jammers. I'm afraid they're up to something over there. I've been trying to head to the mountain, but the undead swarms anyone who leaves the town. We've tried breaking out but their shields were too strong."

"I'll deal with it," Zac said as the leaf appeared again beneath his feet. "There are no elites here, it seems. I think this whole army is a diversion. I'll be back in a bit."

The next second he was hundreds of meters away, speeding toward the secluded valley.

Panic coursed through Zac's body as he infused the flying treasure with the Fragment of the Bodhi. He had handed over control of the network of arrays he had erected around the island to his sister upon leaving, so he hadn't noticed anything wrong at all since arriving. His thoughts were a mess as he tried to figure out the purpose of whoever had breached the arrays.

Were they looking for Alea, or did they have some other agenda?

Was it because of the mutated Tree of Ascension? That thing would no doubt be of huge value for anyone dabbling with poison, perhaps even after having reached E-Grade. However, there should be no way that the Undead Empire knew about it as access to the valley was completely restricted after Zac took control of the island.

Besides, things wouldn't end well even if the invaders weren't there specifically for Alea. Would they simply let her rest in peace after seeing her next to the Tree of Ascension? Of course not.

Zac and his sister had placed strong protective arrays around the whole valley to keep people away, but the invaders were either extremely strong or adept at breaking arrays. The inner shield protecting Alea's Stasis Array wasn't much stronger than the outer one, and Zac was doubtful that it would prove a challenge to whoever had encroached upon the valley.

Less than five minutes had passed since he left the outskirts of Azh'Rodum, but he felt like it had been hours when he finally breached the crest leading into the valley. He immediately noticed that there was something wrong with the outer array covering the whole valley like a dome. It was still intact, but it felt completely drained of energy like it was just there for show.

The leaf shot straight through it, and he was at the core of the valley in seconds. However, his fears were immediately realized as he spotted four hooded individuals sitting in a circle around Alea's stasis array, right next to the [Tree of Ascension]. An intricate array covered the ground around the stasis array, and Zac sensed extremely pure fluctuations of Death-Attuned energies from the crystals powering it.

Zac jumped down from the flying treasure and rushed forward like an enraged beast, his axe already shining with a sanguine glow. The air popped around him as his aura billowed out without restraints, and even the slumbering Splinter stirred in his mind from Zac's towering fury.

"So you are he-" the closest man said with a hoarse voice, but he couldn't even finish his sentence before he was obliterated by a world-ending punch, turning into scraps of flesh that rained down upon the area.

The three others quickly rose from their seated positions around the array and unleashed what looked like a swarm of jumbo mosquitoes at him, but Zac ignored them as he unleashed a Dao field based on his strongest Dao Fragment. Many of the bugs died from the sharpness of the domain, but even more managed to resist as they assaulted every piece of exposed skin on his body.

The spectral forest of [Hatchetman's Sprit] rose from the ground, and an emerald shield protected Zac from the gnats as he cut through the swarm. The hooded warriors released another barrage of what seemed to be poisonous insects and airborne toxins, but everything was destroyed by Zac's furious assault.

The second robed warrior was quickly cut into a dozen pieces from a furious barrage of swings, and the third was literally ripped apart the moment Zac caught him with his free hand. Only one final warrior remained in just a couple of seconds, and Zac had him caught in an iron grip as he took ragged breaths due to barely restrained rage.

He had gotten even angrier as he had seen the Stasis Array at close distance, as it had obviously been tampered with. The golden glass was replaced by a murky black sheen, and he couldn't even see Alea's body inside due to an extremely dense violet cloud within the glass. He couldn't even tell whether she was alive or dead while standing just a few meters away.

"Tell me, what have you done?!" he roared as he ripped off the hood of the man, exposing a man that looked like a corpse that had been left out in a desert for weeks.

"Fractured soul, not living, not dead," the man wheezed with a laugh. "I was anointing her to become an elite of our Empire, but now it's all for naught. You might as well put the girl out of her misery."

"Tell me how to fix this!" Zac screamed into the man's face, his anger towering to an unprecedented degree.

"Death is the destination for all. You can't fight fate," the desiccated husk of a man laughed, and Zac's danger sense soon erupted, forcing him to throw the man away.

The hooded Lich exploded into an enormous cloud of gasses that were no doubt extremely toxic, but a few wide swings with [Verun's Bite] pushed the cloud north and toward the edge of the island.

Zac only took a cursory glance at the surroundings before running over toward the glass array that had kept Alea's soul from crumbling any further. However, he stumbled after just a few steps, and his mind started to become cloudy. He quickly ate one of his best antidotes as he circulated the Fragment of the Coffin in an effort to refine the invisible toxins that must have made their way into his body.

Helplessness threatened to immobilize him as he looked down at the array. He somewhat regretted not bringing his sister in his hurry to get here in time, but he instinctively knew there was nothing she could do in front of something like this. He ripped out the four crystals powering the array, and they were no-doubt D-Grade Miasma Crystals from the fluctuations.

Extremely condensed streams of death-attuned energies tried to infect his body without him even trying to absorb anything, but his Specialty Core just trembled a bit as it absorbed the infiltration. Zac put the crystals into his pouch as he swung his axe a few times to ruin the intricate layout of inscriptions covering the ground, and the array immediately lost any remaining strength.

The array was stopped, but his heart still hammered as he gripped the cover glass coffin to push it away. But before he even had a chance to move the lid an invisible shockwave erupted from within, and his surroundings changed the next instant.