

The Fall 495

Chapter 495: Turbulence

"You sure you need me for this?" Ogras said as he looked at the modified Teleportation Array with some trepidation. "It might cause less strain on the array the fewer people who goes, it might be better if I just stay behind after all."

"This is our only shot, and I might not be able to deal with this alone," Zac said. "Besides, what are you whining about? Even a teenager is going, and you're afraid?"

"Sending two or ten people won't really make a difference to the Array," Kenzie adding from the side, a hint of schadenfreude in her eyes. "As long as we enter the same time we have as good a chance of surviving as when going alone."

"Don't speak such unlucky words," Ogras muttered, but it looked like he had resigned himself to going with the rest.

"Is there anything we need to know?" Zac asked the old Sky Gnome to the side.

"The moment the [Spatial Reinforcement Array] activates it will cause a clash with whatever the unliving have planted," Gemidir said. "If you see new destinations appearing in the teleportation screen it means it's working. For the time being."

"For the time being?" Zac repeated skeptically.

"Our array will probably only last a minute or two against the jammers of the undead empire, so you can't dally or hesitate," Kenzie said. "Immediately pick an option and we'll all jump onto the array. We can't waste a single second. Just make sure you don't pick a town in the wrong direction."

Zac looked around, his eyes turning to Joanna and her squad of six valkyries who silently stood behind her. Zac recognized all of them, as they were all among the oldest members who had followed him all the way from Greenworth. They had followed him to both close incursions and conquer the underworld. The constant battle had utterly reforged them into stalwart warriors.

Their gear was swapped out since the last time he saw them though. All of them wore massive shields made from chitinous shells on their backs, each one large enough to cover their whole bodies. Their goal in the upcoming fight wasn't to boost Zac's prowess, but rather use their newly-acquired War Arrays to protect the rear against unanticipated attacks.

He couldn't always protect Emily and his sister, but this group of six would hopefully be able to stall long enough for him to come to their aid. Zac took a deep breath before he turned to the ancient Sky Gnome who stood by to the side.

"Do it," Zac said as he opened his teleportation screen.

It only showed the handful of teleportation arrays that were studded across the island, but nothing beyond that. He heard some tinkering sounds as the Gnome drew some lines to connect the final power outlets, and a hum suddenly echoed out from the array as Zac felt his vision doubling for a second.

However, Zac forcibly ignored the odd effect and immediately chose a town he recognized. It was one of the newly created settlements close to the shore of Pangea, as he figured a shorter jump would have a higher success rate.

Zac jumped into the array, dragging a swearing Ogras by his lapel just in case the demon chose to change his mind at the last second. The array whisked them away, and his surroundings were replaced by darkness.

However, something felt wrong. It was as though he was being squeezed through a too-thin a pipe. The discomfort quickly turned to pain, but there was nothing he could do about it. He wasn't in control of himself during these types of teleportations, and he could only endure the pain and pray that the others were fine.

But the darkness of subspace suddenly cracked, and Zac found himself far up in the sky, heedlessly tumbling from the wind as droplets of blood rained down all around him. Screams echoed out from every direction, and he saw multiple bloodied people flailing about. He was obviously wounded as well judging by the blood around him, but they were flesh wounds at worst considering his sturdy frame.

However, his sister and Emily weren't so lucky, and they were utterly drenched in blood as they fell toward the ground. The scene made his heart burn with anxiety, and four chains shot out as [Love's Bond] transformed to its backpack form. The emerald leaf appeared beneath him the next moment, and five seconds later the whole group was collected and safe.

Ogras and Kenzie had appeared on top of the leaf by their own means, whereas Joanna had managed to throw out ropes to half the valkyries. Zac only needed to snatch up a screeching Emily and the rest of the Valkyries. Thankfully everyone was fine, apart from getting bloodied. No one had died and no one sported a crippling wound.

Only then did Zac take stock of their whereabouts, and he frowned when he realized they were above the open sea. No matter what direction he looked in there was nothing, just sky and water. There was a pretty nasty storm cloud in one direction, but there was not a hint of shoreline.

"Is everyone okay?" Joanna said with a hoarse voice from the side.

"I'm fine," Kenzie said as she ate a healing pill. "I think they booby-trapped the subspace by filling it with spatial tears or something. If we had continued the whole way we would probably have emerged as chunks of meat. Thankfully we installed a failsafe in the array that would take us out of subspace if it got deadly."

"You had?" Zac said with surprise.

"Do you think I would gamble with all our lives?" Kenzie retorted with exasperation.

"Where the hell are we though?" Ogras muttered from the side as shadows rushed through his alabaster hair and face to remove any blood.

"We can't be anywhere close to the Dead Zone," Joanna said as she looked around. "The array in the sky is massive, yet we can't see it at all. I think we might be some distance away from the continent."

“Well, we’ll just have to fly,” Kenzie said as she pointed in a certain direction. “We should hit land as long as we move in that direction.”

Zac guessed that Jeeves had calculated it for her based on the suns in the sky or something, and he unhesitantly sent a mental command to the leaf. However, Zac soon enough handed over the task of steering the vessel to Joanna as he wanted to take the opportunity to start leveling up in earnest.

The leaf was terrifyingly quick, but New Earth was also shockingly large, so now was as good a time as any to start eating his stock of Node-breaking pills. There was the issue of Pill Toxicity, but right now wasn’t a time to worry about that.

Besides, his new Hidden Node might even have some ability to deal with toxicity. He didn't feel any better after getting bled by the spatial tears, but he also shouldn't carry a lot of toxicity just yet. He doubted it would let him eat pills indiscriminately even if it worked, but it would still be a great help since he didn’t have access to things like cleansing arrays at the moment.

Now that Zac knew what kind of energies he was dealing with he felt confident enough to swallow two Node Breaking Pills at once. He wanted to see whether they attacked different Nodes, or if there was some sort of system to which nodes were opened.

“Lunatic,” a disgusted grunt came from the side as the demon looked on with shock. "The heavens won't abide with you forever, you know?"

Zac only flipped the demon off in response before he focused on the two balls of fire that had erupted in his belly.

He was happy to see that they both stopped by one of the nodes in his left leg after having skittered about for a bit, as that proved that he would be able to improve his leveling speed as long as his body could take the extra strain. But Zac started sweating from pain immediately the moment the two streams of power entered the nodes.

There wasn’t a simple doubling of pain when taking two pills, but rather an exponential increase by ten times. It felt like his leg was getting continuously stabbed, but he grit his teeth and endured it until the pain finally stopped after half an hour. Was this what it would feel like to brute-force nodes in the future?

This time the Node didn't even break open even after ingesting two pills, and Zac unhesitantly slammed two more of them. Another bout of agony lasting for half an hour passed, and the second node had finally been opened. He took a shuddering breath before he kept going. It felt like torture, but he wanted to gain as many levels as possible before he reached the Dead Zone, especially now that he had brought his people with him.

Zac didn't know how much time had passed as he crammed one pill after another down his gullet as though he was possessed. Sweat streamed down his body, and soon enough the sweat had turned red as he actually started bleeding from his pores. His sister tried to stop his manic assault on his nodes multiple times, but Zac shrugged away the attempts as he felt it was working.

But finally he couldn't take the pain any longer, but he had already broken open his fifth node and gained its equivalent level by that point. The suns had started to set by that point already, meaning that Zac had been occupied for at least 4 or 5 hours.

"Just what did you eat growing up?" Ogras muttered from the side when he saw that Zac finally had stopped abusing himself. "This was not what I meant that it was fine to start taking Node-Breaking Pills. Taking pills like that should be a straight ticket to the morgue, or at least the infirmary."

Zac could only respond with a weak smile, and he guessed that this wasn't the time to explain that he was actually a bit disappointed with the results of the experiment. When he was forcibly instilled with the Miasma from tens of thousands of Zombies he managed to eat ten purification pills in one go. Just three was supposed to be a death sentence, but he survived just fine.

He had thought that he would at least be able to take four or five Node Breaking pills in one go to speed up the process, especially after gaining the odd Hidden Node. But he honestly didn't dare to even try three of them at the moment.

The experiment also indicated that the [Void Heart] did not have much of an effect when ingesting pills. He couldn't sense his heart doing anything at all, really, compared to the noticeable effect when absorbing a Miasma Crystal. Did it perhaps only work on natural sources of energy, rather than refined ones? The man in the vision had eaten the void and a sun, after all, not a mountain of pills.

Another stark realization was that he couldn't simply eat Node Breaking Pills continuously. He felt that he was quickly building up a resistance as they traveled, and by the time he had cracked open the fifth node he wasn't very confident there was any point in continuing his mad consumption. He knew that once couldn't simply keep eating pills for a few days and reach the peak of the E-Grade, but he still felt it was too early to feel this kind of response.

"Isn't there anything I can do?" Zac asked. "I still have a lot of pills."

"The resistance will decrease with time, but the process is pretty tedious. And you won't get the full effect again no matter how long you wait." Ogras leered. "But gaining levels through killing and cultivation also helps reset your body, so to speak. I guess you've reached your cap for now unless you find some Natural Treasure with similar effects."

Zac sighed, but he guessed he should be thankful there was a limit to how much you could gain from just cramming a bunch of pills down your gullet. If there were no restrictions then the Incursion leaders would all have been level 150 rather than 80 to 90 by now. Gaining 5 full levels in one day was still extremely good, and it had boosted his attributes by a shocking degree.

However, he still wasn't out of things to use just because he couldn't eat any more Node-breaking pills. Zac swapped over to his Draugr form and took out one of his D-Grade Miasma Crystals. He didn't have too many of them, but Zac figured it would be enough to fill up the five empty Nodes on his Undead Side.

Terrifying waves of Death-Attuned energies slammed into his body as he started absorbing a D-Grade crystal for the first time. It felt like he was deep inside the liquid miasma that surrounded Be'Zi for a second, almost drowning from the waves crashing through him. But he soon managed to steady himself and, it felt like he had ascended to the heavens because of how good it felt.

He could barely restrain himself from moaning out loud, which would have become an eternal point of embarrassment in front of this group. He would rather stab himself to snap out of it than being forced to listen to Emily's and Ogras' taunts over the following centuries.

Zac noticed that the death-attuned energy from the Miasma Crystal didn't have any idea where to move, in contrast to the Pills that almost seemed to have homing capabilities. Still, it wasn't too hard for Zac to push the excess miasma into the sluggish whirlpool on his right arm. It felt like the whirl was like a bottomless hole as more and more energies burrowed into the spot, gradually filling it with vigor.

The stagnant whirlpool slowly started to pick up speed, but it took Zac well over an hour before he felt a shudder through his body as the node stopped consuming Miasma. The time it took wasn't too bad, but it was still more than expected.

He had leveled pretty damn quickly with E-Grade crystals in the F-Grade, and he was already in the 40's by the time he got his hands on some. If he got some E-Grade crystals at level 1, then he'd blast through levels like they were nothing.

It only got worse from there though, as the second node took almost 50% longer to fill up until another wave of power spread through his body. He simply kept going though as land was still nowhere near in sight.

The third node took over three hours to fill, and the fourth node took five. It had cost him 9 D-Grade crystals to complete, which was pretty bad news. It had almost emptied his stock, and this was just for filling already opened nodes. The node breaking was the most energy-demanding part, and it seemed like using Nexus Crystals to level up would already be impractical for him by the time he reached level 80 with both his classes.

Zac still had one more node to fill with energy though, but he stopped as they finally could see land far in the distance.