

The Fall 502

Chapter 502: Scourge

Zac froze as he looked up at the sky with shock in his eyes, but he quickly regained his wits. However, he couldn't help but feel some sourness in his heart as he looked at the familiar figure in the sky, as he knew it wasn't Alea come back to life.

The avatar looked a lot like the poison mistress, but there were also undeniable differences. Its eyes didn't have the signature red irises, but they were rather pitch-black and without emotion. The same went for her usually expressive features, as it was the same delicate face but without any of the emotions.

The previously beautiful horns that shimmered in red like a sunset or crystallized fire were replaced by far longer curved horns, these ones tainted by green and purple. She no longer looked like the Torrid Demonkin that all the members of Clan Azh'Rezak belonged to, but was rather an avatar of corruption.

Perhaps this was what she would look like if she had managed to perfect and awaken her poison constitution before she fell, though Zac felt her appearance had more to do with the materials that went into the creation of [Love's Bond].

The skill didn't create a whole body either, which was yet another reminder it wasn't actually Alea. Beneath her upper torso there was only black smoke that reached down into the coffin. Yet this semi-corporeal avatar was still more than ten meters in height, and it completely blocked Zac from the Array Towers' barrage of attacks that were bearing down on him.

The demonic avatar's arms were formed as well, and they reached up toward the incoming attacks as though she wanted to embrace them. A small sphere appeared in between her outstretched hands, a small seed that started to rapidly spin around its own axis. It was as though this unassuming ball was a black hole, and the air around it immediately started to twist and distort.

The torrential downpour of poison, ice, and miasma was seemingly unending, but it was all dragged into the small seed. It almost looked like the attacks tried to ignore the suction, but they were distorted and bent beyond their normal shape as they were dragged inside kicking and screaming.

Zac first thought the attacks were weaker than expected, but then a trail of ice broke free from the suction of [Death's Embrace] and slammed into the wall twenty meters from him. The wall immediately froze right over, creating a huge ice block that sealed over thirty unlucky Revenants inside. Even Zac felt some pain in his feet as the ice spread across the wall-walk, and he had to circulate some energy to not get frozen as well.

But there were only a few such examples as most of the attacks were sucked into the rapidly rotating ball. It grew larger and larger until it had turned into a chaotic sun that illuminated the whole fortress in green and azure light. Only then did the offensive arrays run out of steam, and the arrays slowly stopped radiating power.

The ball stayed where it was between the arms of the avatar though, and Alea's avatar slowly cradled it in her arms as she put her cheek against its surface in an embrace. Zac couldn't help but feel some

trepidation as he looked at the ball. If that thing destabilized and exploded then it would probably be game over even for him. He wouldn't get away without some serious wounds at the least.

But the ball appeared completely inert, and Zac's eyes widened as Alea's maw opened wider and wider until it swallowed the thing whole. It looked absolutely horrific as the glowing sphere was even larger than Alea's head, but it was still gobbled down whole. The whole avatar lit up with terrifying power, but it didn't unleash a strike or something with the excess energy.

Instead it started to dissipate into clouds that receded toward the coffin.

Zac couldn't help himself, and he tried to send his mind to the avatar in hopes of getting a response, but Alea didn't so much as look at him. There was no connection like the one he felt with Verun either, and Zac shook his head before he gave up. The lid snapped shut the moment the avatar had returned to the coffin, and Zac didn't even get a chance to look inside.

A few violent shakes rocked the Spirit Tool, but it still seemed fine overall. In fact, it felt like it had just eaten a treasure, and it gained a slight green luster as it turned back to its necklace form again.

This was the first skill of [Love's Bond], a terrifyingly powerful summon that not could defend against most kinds of attacks, but it could even take the energy for itself. The full-powered blast of the undead fortress would probably have been able to seriously harm him in his human form, but now it was turned into food for his new Spirit Tool instead.

However, while the skill was extremely powerful it wasn't without its limits. It would take days for the skill to be usable again, perhaps over a week if it took longer to refine the ball of poison. But it was still just what Zac needed. The defensive charges on his robes were essentially useless for someone like him by this point, and this was an excellent replacement.

His life wasn't in danger very often, but when it was he needed an extremely powerful, and preferably reusable, skill that could turn calamity into opportunity.

Having stolen a full-powered blast of the array towers meant he had avoided crisis for now, but he still didn't want to wait around for the towers to recharge for another salvo. He immediately rushed into the fortress toward the closest tower, but he was immediately beset by attacks from hidden mechanisms from every direction as the remaining soldiers on the wall followed him into the fortress, joining the hidden defenders in assaulting him.

Arrows, ice spears, and blobs of poison shot toward him from hidden vantages, and Zac could barely see the dour sky any longer from the chaotic waves of power. It looked like the Lich King had already expected his outer shields to be broken, so he had set up a second layer of defense. These attacks by themselves weren't a threat to someone with 2000 Endurance, but they still required him to either dodge or block with [Nature's Barrier].

It would slowly drain him of his energy, which had already taken somewhat of a hit from activating [Death's Embrace] and [Deforestation]. However, his recent increase in attributes came with a massive boost to his Cosmic Energy reserves, while his skills were still all F-Grade. It meant his endurance was through the roof, and he would be able to keep going for a lot longer even in a frantic situation like this.

A fractal forest rose from the ground, turning the dour fortress into one filled with greenery. It was immediately beset by a storm of miasma though, causing a battle between life and death inside the fortress. However, even if he couldn't utilize the skill to its utmost potential, he still gained most of its benefits.

It felt like he had gained a thousand eyes, and Fractal blades started to shoot out in seemingly random directions as his right arm was turning into a blur. One wall after another crumbled, exposing squads of soldiers hidden within.

More Cosmic Energy entered his body, and he kept forcing it into the node in his leg as he reached the first Array Tower. He finally reached a point where he didn't dare to infuse any longer, as he clearly felt the node was on the verge of cracking open. He could only reluctantly let the remaining energy dissipate, as this fight was too important.

He couldn't risk crippling himself from an experiment while the Lich King was still standing, but he could always open the node at a later date.

Zac grunted as [Verun's Bite] screamed through the air as he focused his frustration on the tower in front of him instead, but a fractal appeared on the surface of the stones the moment the edge was about to bite into bricks. A concussive mental wave exploded out from the inscription, but Zac was barely phased as he swung again.

This time the defensive array was expended, and a fifty-meter fractal edge cut the massive tower clean off after Zac bombarded the skill fractal for [Chop] with Cosmic Energy. Zac couldn't help but feel that the skill description was right; there was greatness in simplicity. Now that he could control far more energy thanks to his improved pathways, [Chop] had grown all the more lethal.

A terrifying punch followed, and a cloud of dust billowed out as the lofty structure crumbled.

Zac wouldn't stop there, and he destroyed one tower after another in quick succession, taking out over fifty squads of elite soldiers along the way. A shudder in the distance told Zac that Ogras had begun his assault on the general as well, and he couldn't help but worry about the safety of his sister.

However, not only did she carry two of his Defensive Treasures, but she also had Jeeves to detect any surprises coming her way. He would be able to return and help the squad in case they were starting to get overrun, but he felt that he would be able to deal with this place before it came to that.

A crash resounded next to him as his unique fractal blade blasted through a wall, utterly ripping it apart. Zac had instructed the special fractal blade to cause maximum structural damage, and it was like a hurricane that accompanied him on his rampage through the fortress. It kept expending Cosmic Energy, but Zac had more than enough to spare.

The last Array Tower finally crumbled as Zac unleashed a barrage of furious stikes at its base, and it toppled over and crushed another section of the wall. With the Lich King staying out of the way he had become completely unstoppable, and the towers didn't even get the chance to launch a second round of attacks before they were all smoldering ruins.

The gargantuan Array Towers also doubled as Unholy Beacons, and their destruction would hopefully put a stop to the various arrays in the area, including the ones in the sky that kept shooting down waves

of death toward the ground. It was pretty clear to Zac that the Lich King was an adept Array Master, perhaps even having that as his main class.

So taking out the towers was in a way directly cutting limbs off the Incursion Leader, as he wouldn't be able to utilize their power any longer.

However, even though a battle between Ogras and the banshee raged in full in the distance whereas Zac was running around inside the fortress like an enraged bull, the Lich King still hadn't shown his face. Zac couldn't help but feel the Lich was cooking up something, and his eyes turned toward a seemingly inconspicuous structure to the side of the fortress.

Or rather toward the ground beneath it.

He had kept watch for any suspect energy fluctuations during his rampage, but the Lich King had truly hidden himself well. There were no hotspots of Death-Attuned energies anywhere that could give Zac a clue to either the location of the incursion leader or the core of the realignment array. Zac had first thought the Lich would go to some throne room to prepare his last defense, but the cathedral-like castle in the back of the fortress was completely devoid of both movement and energy.

However, Zac had made some discoveries.

The towers actually seemed to form a pattern around the building he was looking at, almost forming a star shape if you would draw a line between their placements on a map. Zac felt it possible that the Lich King had used those towers as a conduit to the realignment array, and he might therefore stay inside that building where the power would be concentrated.

It was either that, or the Lich had fled through a hidden tunnel toward the Incursion Beacon that was placed some distance behind the fortress.

Zac dismissed his fractal edge as he ran over to the building, and simply punched a hole through the wall before he walked in. A normal door might be booby-trapped, so it was better to create your own entrance. However, the structure was just as unexciting on the inside as outside. It seemed to have been some sort of administrative building, with dozens of desks placed with some distance between.

It was empty now, but the place was stacked with various missives and reports, somewhat skewing Zac's impression of how the invasion had worked. It looked a lot more structured from this side, compared to the seemingly mindless hordes that had spread across the continent like locusts with just the smallest of inputs from a few leaders.

But this showed a lot more refinement.

However, that wasn't why Zac came here, and he walked back and forth through the building until he found what he was looking for. There really seemed to be something beneath this building, though he couldn't find an entrance. There were occasional waves of Death Attuned energies rising from beneath, indicating something was going on. They were pretty minute though, and he probably wouldn't have noticed them without [Cosmic Gaze].

The ground shook and pieces of gravel flew in every direction as Zac started to cut a path down, and he quickly destroyed the floor as he dug a twenty-meter deep hole. The cuts started to sound hollow at

that point, and Zac started to make his way forward with greater care. Finally, the edge cut straight through the ground, displaying a dimly lit hall beneath.

There was no way his digging had gone by unnoticed, so a sneak attack was out the window. He still took out a corpse from his Spatial Ring and threw it inside, waiting for any potential trap to spring. A thud echoed out a second later, and Zac guessed the hidden chamber had a fifty-meter ceiling.

There was no response, so Zac simply activated [Nature's Barrier] while infusing the always-running [Mental Fortress] with a Dao Fragment as he jumped down. His eyes glared in every direction as he fell, but there was no attack coming at him. Instead, he found himself in an enormous room full of inscribed pillars. The only light came from purple crystals embedded in the room, giving it an oppressive feeling.

Was this the core of the Realignment Array? Zac immediately moved to start destroying the pillars, but he froze when he suddenly heard a voice on the other side of the room.

"It seems I made a miscalculation," a sigh echoed out across the vast chamber. "To think that your power had increased to this degree in just a few short days. It shouldn't be possible, yet here we are. You stole my precious poison corpse and somehow turned it into a treasure shield, and now you are ruining my mission. You truly are a scourge."