

The Fall 634

Chapter 634: Seals

The last remnants of the bishop's suicidal attack eventually dissipated, which allowed Zac and the others to deactivate their defensive skills. With the bishop down the battle was all but over, and there were two options to Zac at the moment; go with his army for a while or immediately set off toward the top of the mountain.

"Ah, why do you smell weird?" Billy suddenly said as he stepped closer to Zac, dragging him out of his musings.

"Might be because the guy I fought smelled?" Zac smiled as he activated his Specialty Core once more.

"Haha! Just like Billy when Billy was fighting the ratlight. Billy made Nigel puke once by standing ten meters away. But Billy will not puke even if you smell like a corpse," Billy laughed, but he suddenly gave a start. "Ah? You smell normal again?"

"Crazy world, different smells," Zac shrugged, prompting Billy to sagely nod in agreement.

Of course, it was simply Zac having returned to his human form again. His actions might have been spotted even with Ogras' shadow wall, but everyone was busy fighting their own battles. Most people would probably guess that he had used some death-attuned talisman from the Undead Incursion if they even realized the skills were wrought with Miasma.

That wasn't an accident. Zac had already let his Valkyries spread rumors about him finding all kinds of death-attuned treasures when taking out the Lich King. He knew that his excuses weren't perfect and that people would sooner put two and two together about the identity of Mr. Black. This way he would hopefully be able to create some misdirection though, which was only helped by the fact of how outlandish the truth was.

The Anointed next to him were obviously not as easily tricked due to their extremely sharp senses, but they didn't comment on the situation either.

A scream in the distance reminded Zac of the situation, and he could only table the matter for now. He still had some energy left in the tank, and while this battle was a rare opportunity for his people to improve through battle, he didn't want his elites to die at a place like this.

"Let's finish things up before deciding our next step," Zac said, and the Anointed nodded in agreement.

Zac immediately set off, and the remaining pockets of fiercely resisting zealots were cut apart in seconds wherever he appeared. Explosions quickly started to rock the area as the cultists realized that it was over and decided to blow themselves up. His people were thankfully already used to the crazed conviction of the Church of Everlasting Dao, so very few soldiers were killed from those final blasts.

It took just ten minutes until the battle was over, with not a single cultist remaining. Zac had tried to capture a few to question them about the whereabouts of their leaders, but they simply blew themselves up without hesitation the moment he got close.

The battle had been pitched even with the advantage of Zac providing aid. The cultists were not only higher leveled than most, but they had better heritages as well. Their skills more powerful and they

were also better trained. If it wasn't for the large number of Anointed steamrolling everything and smashing their cooperation, the losses would have been way worse.

But even with the advantages of Zac himself brought along with the activation of [Judgment], over three hundred elites had fallen in the battle. His people were simply too tired after the mad dash to the mountain. They had lost at least two hundred soldiers who ran out of energy, and many of those who made it were just hanging on by a thread. They weren't in any condition to fight, and many were killed even if they stayed in the back.

"Everyone, rest up for an hour," Zac said as he looked across the harried army. "I know you're tired, but we need to gather those Spatial Seals if we want to get out of this place."

The soldiers' faces relaxed from relief when they heard that they could finally rest, and most plonked down on the ground where they stood, not caring whether they were sitting right next to a corpse or a patch of burning metal. Everyone quickly closed their eyes and started absorbing energy from Nexus Crystals.

The ambient energy wasn't actually bad on the mountain; on the contrary, it even eclipsed the energy back on his island. It looked like all the Cosmic Energy of the Mystic Realm had been gathered in one spot, which benefitted the survivors greatly.

Zac was about to sit down and rest as well, but he sensed a familiar aura approaching. His heart lurched for a bit, but he quickly found his bearings before turning around with a smile.

"Hey," Thea smiled.

Zac was about to answer, but he forgot himself and his smile froze when he saw Thea's state. She had thick dark circles under her eyes, to the point that it almost looked like she had two black eyes. Her hands and face were covered in burns, and her aura was fluctuating worryingly.

One of her arms was limply hanging to her side, and her battlesuit was drenched in blood. It was no wonder he had only seen Thea releasing a single attack at the beginning of the battle. She had clearly pushed herself beyond her limits even before he arrived. After all, she was still in the F-Grade and didn't have the benefits of the energy reserves that reaching E-grade brought through the easily-gained levels.

Zac's hurriedly flashed over and grabbed her by her waist before he flashed away again. A few quick steps took them to a secluded spot behind a Memorysteel cliff, and he carefully set her down on one of his cultivation mats.

"Are you okay?" he said with worry as he quickly took out a couple of Soul Crystals and healing pills.

Her physical wounds didn't seem too bad, though Zac knew she didn't have his neigh-unkillable constitution. Her unstable aura was a lot worse, as it usually meant her soul was wounded or overdrafted.

"I'll be fine, I'm just a bit wrung dry," Thea sighed as she gratefully accepted the Soul Crystals.

"Just rest up, we'll talk later," Zac said as he sat down next to her.

Zac himself was in a much better state than Thea. His energy reserves were running a bit low, but physically he was fine apart from some burns and minor wounds. He would be back to full strength in

just a few hours. As for Thea, he wasn't so sure. He feared it might take weeks, even months for her to get back to perfect condition.

He didn't want to disturb her at this moment, so the two sat next to each other in silence and focused on recuperation. Of course, Zac wasn't in as wretched a state as Thea, so he took the time to take stock of the situation while absorbing Cosmic Energy.

The first thing he noticed was that a brand had appeared on the top of his right hand, shining with a grey light as it emitted spatial fluctuations. His first reaction was that the Asura had left some sort of dangerous mark on him at the end, but he quickly discarded that thought. It was clear that the 'flavor' for the rune on his hand was completely different compared to the heritage of the Church of Everlasting Dao.

Besides, he noticed that Thea had an identical mark on her hand, and he quickly realized what was going on. He had gained a Spatial Seal sometime during the battle. However, he couldn't remember seeing that seal on the bishop's hand. So either he got it from one of the soldiers he killed afterward, or it could somehow be hidden.

However, considering how bloodthirsty the System was, Zac doubted that it would let people obfuscate the fact that they were in possession of a ticket out of this place.

It was a relief to see that both he and Thea were safe for the moment, and that relief only increased when he opened his quest screen. His quest had actually increased to (738/3000) in progression, meaning that this battle had actually progressed his quest by almost 25%. It proved that it shouldn't be too hard to complete the quest.

The Zealots might have reached the mountain pretty early considering how soon they managed to start collapsing bridges, but they seemed to have focused on taking out the competition rather than gathering Seals from the way it looked. Even then a majority of them owned a seal from the looks of it.

Only after fifty minutes did Thea stir, prompting Zac to look over.

"I thought we lost you guys for a second there," Thea said with a weak smile.

"Well, if it's one thing I'm good at, it's staying alive," Zac laughed. "I'm glad you're okay as well. About before..."

"I'm sorry, I shouldn't have done that when things were so chaotic," Thea said, her eyes flickering.

"No, I'm glad you did," Zac said as he put his hand on hers.

Her mouth quirked upward a bit as her lithe fingers entwined with his.

"Shameless couple," a teasing snort suddenly emerged from the shadows.

"You again," Thea muttered before she turned to Zac. "If he was half as strong as he is annoying, he would have routed those cultists by himself."

"I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but there isn't really time for you to take a romantic time-out," the demon said, ignoring Thea's jab.

“What’s going on?” Zac asked with a frown as he got up with a grunt.

“Your sister and the scientists have made some measurements. This place will last three more days at the most. The seed is continuously accumulating energy inside that globe in the sky. The dimension won’t be able to take it any longer than that,” Ogras said. “As for whether the treasure is already ripe for the plucking or not, who’s to say?”

“Three days,” Zac frowned as he looked up at the massive moon hovering above the mountain peak.

“We tried ascending the mountain before,” Thea said as she followed his gaze. “There is a weird pressure that increases the further up we go. Most people won’t make it past the halfway point. I’d say you need the strength of an E-Grade warrior to reach the peak.”

“It will probably take half a day to reach the Seed from our position, perhaps even more if there are complications inside the sphere,” Ogras added.

“I’ll stay with our people... For now,” Zac said without hesitation. “We’ll follow the same general plan as before. We’ll circulate the mountain to look for the Dominators while harvesting Seals.”

“What? Why?” Ogras exclaimed with confusion. “There’s no guarantee that the one to first to reach the Dimensional Seed will get it, but it won’t hurt our chances. That insect bastard is probably up there as well by now. The same goes for that leader of the cultist lunatics. The real stage of this Mystic Realm isn’t on this desolate mountain, it’s up there.”

Zac waved his hand, and his quest appeared in front of them the next moment.

“Benevolent shepherd,” Ogras muttered before his eyes lit up. “You’re thinking that the Ruthless Heavens wants you to stay down here for a bit?”

“Exactly,” Zac nodded. “If the System only wanted me to lead our people here, then it wouldn’t add the requirement to get three thousand seals. I think there is something important left to do down here. It’s not like I have to keep completing the quests, but my main goal ultimately isn’t the Dimensional Seed. It’s dealing with the threats to earth before the three days are up.”

“Alright... What about the other natives?” Ogras asked.

“Ignore them if we can. They all have their strengths, especially the Lunar Tribe. They’ll be a pain in the ass to deal with here, but we can slowly deal with them after we exit this place,” Zac slowly said.

“What if there are too few of these seals?” Thea asked as she looked down at her hand. “We didn’t really have the time to scout around too much when we dealt with that squad of cultists, but they aren’t exactly littering the ground.”

“If there are too few seals to go around, we’ll target the Lunar Tribe,” Zac slowly said. “They have already proven hostile to our faction, and I’m guessing that they will hold the most seals anyway. Honestly, I wouldn’t be surprised if they’ll target the Cartava survivors and Gemlings for their seals. We might be able to reap all the rewards after they have exhausted themselves.”

“Nothing like harvesting some ill-gotten gains,” Ogras grinned with a ruthless gleam in his eyes.

“How’s your condition?” Zac asked, changing the subject as he inspected the demon. “It didn’t work?”

Zac wasn't asking without reason. The demon had clearly changed since they last met, but not necessarily for the better. Ogras had essentially turned monochrome by this point, the last red tint of his patterned skin gone. Had that serum perhaps accelerated the transformation into a shadow creature?

"I'm just dandy," Ogras grinned. "In fact, never felt better. That bastard is thoroughly subdued, at least for now."

"Good," Zac nodded as he stood up. "Let's go talk with the others. We'll take our people for one final push before we climb the mountain."