

The Fall 637

Chapter 637: Treasure Mountain

There was not much Zac could do to help his people, apart from urging them forward toward parts of the mountain that were hopefully not picked clean. He did consider turning the around more than one time, instead heading in the direction of the Lunar Tribe. There was no way the cultists had picked the lower layers clean in that direction.

But Zac quickly gave up on that idea. Not only were the Lunar Tribe in that direction, but also the Cartava Clan and presumably the second Cultist group considering they had already infiltrated the werewolves. Forcing their way through that direction would result in massive losses, when they could instead hurry toward the opposite side of the mountain where the traitor Zhix hopefully waited.

If they still hadn't found enough seals after dealing with the Zhix problem, they could consider their next move.

It was not only bad news all around though. While the weaker people in the army suffered under the immense pressure of an uncertain future, the elites were actually having impressive gains. The middle layers were a lot more intact compared to the lower ones, probably because the cultists didn't have time to properly loot.

The plan of the Church of Everlasting Dao was no doubt to blow up every single island before turning toward the riches on the peaks, but Zac and his people had cut that strategy short. So that left those in Zac's army who already had a Spatial Seal with ample opportunities to line their pockets.

Zac became more and more sure that the System had a hand in forming the mountain as the hours passed. There were not only clear delimitations of the layers, but the rewards were similarly spread out. Even discounting the cultists' locust-like approach, the upper parts of the mountain clearly held better things.

The caves held all kinds of valuables, most of which seemed untouched even by the natives. Zac was currently standing in a cave on the 11th layer, and the pressure was strong enough to turn a mortal into mush. But the neatly lined-up bushes in front of him were completely unruffled in such an environment, and their leaves somehow rustled by themselves, creating a bell-like tolling that was amplified in the cave.

He had no idea what these bushes, or their small yellow berries, were, but they were obviously something that was intentionally grown judging by how uniform the rows were. Zac sighed in disappointment that he didn't possess a Herbalist Bag, a type of Spatial Tool where you could store plants without killing them, but taking the bushes as is was still a good harvest.

Both his affinity to nature through [Forester's Constitution] and his very cells told him that these berries were something good, and even the leaves seemed to contain quite a bit of energy. Perhaps they could be used in medicinal baths or as feed for spiritual beasts, so Zac immediately went to work.

For the first time in a while, Zac used his axe as a lumbering tool rather than a tool for slaughter, and one bushel after another entered his Spatial Ring. He definitely wasn't lacking space, so Zac swept through the whole cave like a locust, leaving not even the energy-rich soil behind.

Zac exited a moment later, and after confirming there were no issues with the army started looking for the next cave to hit. There were the occasional deserters who needed to be whipped into shape in the beginning, but the Zhix were more than happy to take on that role. They saw that sort of behavior as the highest form of dishonor, and after they had dragged a few cowardly cultivators by their feet back to the army, almost no one dared to sneak away any longer.

Zac's eyes scanned the surroundings as he jogged back and forth between the 11th and the 9th layers, and his eyes lit up when he spotted a burst of nature-attuned energies spreading out like a plume a few hundred meters ahead. There were definitely more spiritual plants in that direction. He knew that such an eruption would have been spotted by others though, so he immediately started running forward, each step moving him almost a hundred meters even across the uneven terrain.

But he swore in annoyance when the shadows congealed right at the cave mouth just as he was about to reach the cave.

"Too late this time," Ogras snickered with a grin that almost split his face apart, seemingly taking more pleasure in beating Zac to the cave than getting the treasures within.

Zac could only shake his head and set off again, not wanting to waste a single second just standing around. Especially if that second was watching the demon 'ooh' and 'aah' over the rare herbs. Zac and the other leaders had quickly decided to turn whole caves into first-come-first-serve among Seal Holders, and he wasn't an exception to the rule.

Part of the motivation was to avoid any fighting for resources hidden inside the caves, but the main reason for it was simply to reward people for repeatedly risking their lives in the Mystic Realm. And some people were walking away with pretty massive gains from the looks of it. People were scurrying back and forth among the Memorycliffs with almost manic fervor.

It wasn't really a loss for Zac to let people take everything they could. There were only so many caves he had time to loot personally, and it was unlikely he would have time to return to these sections later. Better it was used to motivate and power up his people than for it to get lost to the Void in a few days.

The fact that the System didn't provide any rewards for its area quest wasn't as surprising any longer. Zac had initially thought it was punishing people for entering a Technocrat Lab. But it had rather dragged all the realm's riches into the mountain, turning it into a real treasure trove.

The competition to find and reach the caves was fierce, but Zac was powerful enough to freely walk among the higher layers. So his competition was just Ogras and a handful of other elites. He was still keeping a pretty decent distance from the peak though, never going past the 12th layer. Part of the reason was that he was actually losing Cosmic Energy just walking around starting on the 11th layer, and part of it was to quickly be able to help out his people if some problems cropped up.

After all, some people had actually died in the caves after being overeager, and dangerous situations kept popping up one after one.

Most caves and crags were safe, but some held battlebots that started blasting the moment anyone entered. Others held intact technocrat rooms, many of which had the standard defenses. One unlucky cultivator from the Marshall Alliance had actually been completely incinerated by a light beam just like the one the base used to keep the Collector at bay.

There were also stressed-out beasts who had been moved all the way here from different biospheres, hiding in their caves in fright. There were even some plants that were almost as lethal as the Rageroot Oak. So it had almost turned into a lottery what you could find inside the caves by this point, and the Atwood Elites were quickly turning into gambling addicts.

Thankfully the people who had been brought to this place were ultimately professionals, and deaths were pretty rare. Anyone who had survived the integration until this point had multiple ways to stay alive, including methods to scout ahead or determine threats to their lives. If things seemed too dangerous, they could always pass on it and head for the next one.

Kenzie was fast becoming the elite's best friend, happily sending one of her endless drones into the caves in return for 25% of the loot. A few other scouts provided similar services, but they obviously weren't able to spread themselves out like Kenzie could with her drone swarm.

Of course, this feeding frenzy was completely separate from those still hunting seals. Those who still looked for seals could enter all caves to take a look, and seal holders would immediately signal if they spotted a seal. Mostly there was no one close enough to snatch it in time because of the distances involved, but it had saved a few people.

Zac soon found another point of interest; an actual sliding glass door embedded in a sheer cliff wall. It most likely meant it was a piece of a room rather than a biosphere on the other side, but he couldn't see the situation inside because of some sort of smoke. Zac readied himself in case its defenses still worked and walked over to it.

The door didn't open by itself though, perhaps because the terminal was missing, and Zac was forced to force the sliding door open.

A dense wave of some sort of medicinal aroma hit him almost like a punch the moment a crack opened in the door, and he stopped in his tracks with some worry. But he quickly breathed out in relief after realizing that his cells greedily swallowed the energy in the air. It didn't seem to be poison, but Zac felt it wasn't attuned energy either.

He quickly walked inside after marking the door with a Z, making sure others knew it was claimed. Zac immediately closed the doors behind him to not let any of the medicine escape, and a small torrent soon appeared around him as his body greedily absorbed everything it could. Zac couldn't be sure, but he believed that he had reached a bloodline lab since it felt like every cell in his body was slowly improving thanks to the haze.

Most of the interiors of the room were shrouded in the fog, but there seemed to be at least some Base Power remaining judging by flickering lights in the ceiling. Zac started walking inside, but he stopped after just a second upon realizing that the whole room was flooded to his ankles. He took out an Illumination crystal and bent down, and he immediately saw that it wasn't water he was standing in.

The liquid was a bit viscous and had a slight greenish tint, and it didn't take long to realize that it was the source of the thick haze. There were still some medicinal properties remaining, but it was like a medicinal bath by the end of usage. This place probably held some vats before that had cracked when the world shifted.

Zac sighed in disappointment as he looked around. Who knew how much of the medicinal properties were wasted when the liquid started leaking. The compound was clearly not stable, and getting exposed to air seemed to make it dissipate.

At least he knew what was going on, and he activated [Hatchetman's Spirit] after some thought. Visibility was simply too bad because of the fog. A small spiritual forest rose in the mists, and Zac suddenly had a perfect view of the laboratory.

There were no tables with experiments in this place, and neither were there any side-rooms like in the lab he visited before. There still some things of interest though. First of all, was a large pod that could easily fit Zac inside. It stood in the middle of the room, and Zac realized it was filled with liquid when he got close.

However, the liquid inside had a shimmering emerald hue, and its medicinal properties were clearly completely intact in contrast to the stuff on the floor. It almost felt like Zac's cells were drooling with hunger even though the pod had great sealing capabilities, and he could barely stop himself from forcing a way inside.

Next to the pod were a series of consoles that probably were meant to control and observe the pod. They were slightly submerged like everything else, but they were still working. However, the screens did flicker ominously like they could break down at moment's notice. Zac glanced at the displays, but they were just showcasing dense lines of information he couldn't make heads or tails of.

Finally, two thick tubes were connected to the pod, and they ran to the edge of the room. One of them was connected to a large vat, but it was unfortunately broken. It looked like just part of the lab had been transferred here since the massive container was essentially cut off at the middle.

It was no doubt that the liquid on the ground came from this broken container.

The other tube didn't extend into a vat, but instead into some sort of machine. Zac couldn't tell its purpose, partly because of incompetence and partly because the machine was cut-off at the middle just like the large vat. But it all somewhat looked like a dialysis machine since half of a tube ran from the machine to the top of the broken container.

The medicinal liquid would move from the vat into the pod, and the user would absorb the medicinal properties in there. The exhausted liquid would go through the other tube into the machine, where the liquid presumably was infused with more treasures or whatever the medicinal effect came from. This formed a cycle that would keep going as long as one had the materials to run the machine.

The cycle was obviously broken with both vat and infuser being broken, but Zac's eyes turned to the pod in the middle. It held one last dose of the medicine. The question in Zac's mind was what purpose the pod served. Did it improve the efficacy of the drug, or did it just contain it?

He didn't know if he needed to harvest the whole thing or if he could just siphon out the liquid. His instincts leaned toward the former since Leviala had talked about Bloodline Vats. Just drinking the mixtures in this place didn't seem to be enough, they needed to be stimulated somehow to bring out their effect.

The problem was that he didn't know if he was able to do it without ruining the vat, and Kenzie was a long way down the mountain. Zac looked the pod up and down for almost a minute, trying to figure out a way to cut it out from the ground, but an ominous beeping from the console made him freeze.

An extremely dense cloud of medicinal aroma blasted him a moment later as the hatch on the pod opened, and Zac's eyes widened in horror as he saw a storm of medicinal energy dissipate into the atmosphere.

Zac didn't hesitate even a second before he scrambled into the pod and closed the hatch behind him.