

The Fall 650

Chapter 650: Prison

"Ah, what happened to you?!" Billy exclaimed as he looked up at Zac's hulking form. "How are you bigger than Billy?!"

Zac turned toward the Titan, and he saw that the Anointed were looking at him with hesitation as well.

"A few things happened to me in the Dead Zone," Zac sighed, seeing no recourse but to come clean. "It's a secret weapon of mine, I hope you can help me keep this hidden."

"Haha! No problem, Billy has secrets too!" Billy laughed, before he froze and frowned with confusion. "Huh? Why can't Billy remember? Oh well."

The anointed nodded in agreement, not really caring. Their minds were clearly focused on their fallen brethren. Zac inwardly sighed in relief when his Draugr form didn't cause any problems, and he opened his status screen for a few seconds. He didn't look for long though, only long enough to confirm a few things.

The fight was over, and a sharp pain in his left hand made itself reminded the moment he relaxed. It was the damage transferred over when [Nature's Punishment] was incinerated by the small Spiritual Flame. Zac grimaced when he looked down at the blisters, and he could feel that this wasn't something that would be fixed with [Surging Vitality].

There was a pervasive Dao lodged in his arm, and he could only slowly expel it from his body. At least it wasn't his main arm, and it wouldn't affect his combat strength much. He ate one of his better healing pills to keep the effect under wraps while fixing the large number of weaker burns that covered his body.

He ate a Soldier Pill next, quickly restoring a large chunk of his missing Miasma. Zac didn't want to stay this way too long though so he reverted to his human form as soon as the pill had been absorbed.

Eating these Soldier Pills willy-nilly wasn't really good for his body, but he didn't want to keep his undead form exposed for too long in this place. As for what he had checked on his status screen before, it was his Bloodline. He had confirmed a few things with his transformation. First, his Void Emperor-bloodline had awakened in his Draugr-form as well.

Secondly, his undead race was still at the E-Grade, and it felt like he hadn't really made any improvements at all as he had hoped. His Bloodline Nodes were there as well, and Zac wondered how that would impact him as one of the 'five noble races'. Part of their superiority compared to normal Revenants and Corpse Lords had to be related to bloodlines and racial nodes, and who knew how his situation changed that.

The Draugr normally boasted supreme miasmic control along with extremely durable bodies, but what if he got neither because his odd bloodline took precedence over both? And would real Draugr be able to notice the difference?

He regained his human form after a few seconds, and Zac was relatively certain that no outsider should have been able to notice his transformation. The towering flame barriers had hidden his skills, and enormous clouds of ash and some swirled around them right now, completely covering their group.

A deep sigh echoed out from his side, and Zac looked over to see Rhubat placing one of the fallen in his Cosmos Sack. Eight of the Anointed had succumbed to the invisible wave of heat, and the rest sported various degrees of burns. However, they had done it. They had finally taken out the last of these lunatics, snuffing out another threat to earth.

"We need to move," Ogras said with a hoarse voice, his face all black with soot. "Everyone within a hundred kilometers must have spotted this battle."

"Right," Zac nodded as he stilled the tremors in his burned hand.

Everyone ate some healing pills to tide them over as they removed any hints of their involvement best as they could. Zac flashed over and pocketed several treasures where the cultists stood before. Most things had been incinerated, leaving not even the Cosmos Sacks unscathed, but some items survived.

The golden lance looked quite powerful, but the greatest gain was no doubt the Spatial Ring he found next to the Incursion Leader's fire-resistant robes. He also picked up the now-empty lantern and stashed it away. One of the glass panels was cracked, but Zac figured it should be a treasure considering it could trap such a powerful flame.

Altogether the squad only remained a minute longer before they set out, taking advantage of the thick clouds of ash to avoid detection. They didn't take a direct route toward the source of the ripples out of fear that they would be spotted though.

It wasn't like there was any particular target they wanted to hide from, but rather that they didn't want to walk into yet another trap just as they barely escaped the last one. Besides, even if their arrival had been exposed, didn't need to make it worse. So everyone tried to stay under the radar as Zac led them through the still-burning maze, using either his aura or a forceful swing to clear a path.

The group set a diagonal course through the forest somewhat running in a circle around the source of the powerful ripples. The idea was to hit it from a slightly different angle, which would hopefully allow them to cross the mountains unnoticed. A few minutes later they were out of the raging flames, and there thankfully wasn't anyone lying for them in wait.

The group reached the foot of the mountains after another two hours, at which point they finally slowed down. Everyone used various means to scan their surroundings for enemies, but it really looked like there wasn't anyone on their tail. Only then did they find a secluded cave large enough for them all, and sat down to rest after having erected an illusion array.

"Eight crusaders have fallen even before we reached our target," Rhubat rumbled with sorrow in its eyes, and Zac could only sigh.

It was pretty bad luck that the cultists had zeroed in on them rather than the Dominators. Was it too much to ask for those two factions to take each other out?

"Rest up for an hour," Zac said as he distributed some more Soul Crystals and healing pills. "We'll cross the mountain next."

“So what’s the plan?” Ogras asked. “There’s no way that those two bastards think they’re alone in this place after that inferno.”

“Adcarkas is no fool,” Rhubat said with a shake of its head. “The Sage of the Basin no doubt understood that we would be coming for them even without the earlier battle.”

Zac nodded in agreement. He was more worried about having exposed his hidden class than having exposed that he was here. He could only pray that the lure of the Dimensional Seed held a strong enough draw for Void’s Disciple to risk everything to get it, either for his master or for himself.

After all, such an item must hold an almost fatal attraction to a spatial cultivator like him, even if to simply observe its energy fluctuations.

No one had any great ideas of how to deal with what came next, mainly because they didn’t really understand the situation. Why did this realm exist? Why was the Dimensional Seed releasing those ripples? Why hadn’t anyone snatched it yet?

They eventually simply decided to stay hidden as best they could, which wasn’t all-too-easy with over twenty giants that were almost as tall as some of the trees, while they scouted out the Dimensional Seed on the other side of the mountain.

Thankfully, apart from other factions, the hidden realm was extremely safe. In fact, they hadn’t encountered a single animal or beast as they crossed the forest and the mountain. It was a somewhat odd feeling, seeing nature both so vibrant and so void of life.

It took seven hours to cross the mountain, but one of those hours was spent on breaks because people were making breakthroughs left and right. Kenzie, Billy, over half of the Anointed. All of them made some gains from walking between the mountains and feeling the pulse of Earth.

Zac himself didn’t manage to make any Dao breakthroughs like the others, but his level was already a lot higher. However, that wasn’t to say he was without gains of his own. He had made a shocking amount of improvements in his skill department instead.

He had already noticed that [Immutable Bulwark] and [Profane Seal] reached Peak mastery right after the battle, and one skill after another took a step forward over the following hours. [Loamwalker] was next, finally reaching the peak, and it was soon followed by [Hatchetman’s Spirit] reaching late mastery and both [Conformation of Supremacy] and [Surging Vitality] stepping into middle grade.

The most shocking thing was that he even evolved [Deforestation] to late mastery just as they passed the mountain even though he hadn’t actually used the skill at all during the battle before. He soon realized what was going on though.

The cultivation environment of the Mystic Realm had been pretty wretched, which might not have only impacted his Dao, but also his skills. After all, he hadn’t improved a single skill in the Research Base even though he had fought so many desperate battles, which was pretty odd. Now it was like all those accumulated experiences had crystallized into a cascade of breakthroughs when he was flooded with Origin Dao.

He hadn’t tested the change of [Deforestation] because of the cooldown, but the evolution of [Hatchetman’s Spirit] resulted in the forest almost doubling in radius while the defensive charges gained

some strength. The Attribute bonus to Strength and Vitality was still at 10%, but one couldn't complain considering that buff came with literally no downsides.

The improvement wasn't too impressive, but it wasn't bad either. This way he would be able to cover almost a whole army with his energy forest, and there wasn't much his enemies could do about it except targeting the core tree. The amount of information the enormous forest crammed into his brain was a bit jarring at first, but he quickly got the hang of it.

The evolution to peak mastery of [Loamwalker] was more interesting. The largest detriment to that skill was how it was bound to earth, but that rule was finally being modified at the peak. The upgrade didn't give him the power of flight, but he was actually able to take one step in the air with the skill. True to its name the skill still needed loam to walk, and [Loamwalker]'s solution was actually to form a small patch of floating grass beneath his feet.

It was a magical feeling to jump twenty meters into the air, and then suddenly flash forward without gathering any momentum. It was almost like getting a double-jump in a video game, and it would make Zac's fighting a lot more flexible where he wouldn't have to rely on his chains to move while in the air. Unsurprisingly, the downside of the newfound ability of his movement skill was the cost of Cosmic Energy. Air walking once cost more than ten times the amount compared to taking a step on solid ground.

Zac wanted nothing more than to walk around these mountains for a while longer and squeeze out all gains from his accumulated experiences, but time waited for no man. The group finally reached the other side, and it didn't take a genius to figure out where they needed to go.

A massive basin was hidden on the other side of the mountain range, and there was only one thing placed there; an almost impossibly large structure. It was clearly of Technocrat origin, and even from a great distance it was clear that it was created with a lot more care and attention to detail compared to the desolate corridors on the outer sectors of the Research Base.

It seemed to be made of Memorysteel, but it had a slightly different bluish hue, and Zac could feel the emanations of endless Base Power even when they hid a few kilometers away. It was also completely covered in the same type of script that lined the walls of the base. The building itself looked like an enormous dome, and it had to be at least five kilometers tall, almost towering over the mountains around it.

The dome itself was surrounded by nine towers that looked like spikes, and they too were constructed with the special Memorysteel and covered in runes.

However, even with the clearly high-quality construction, the building was suffering extensive damage. Thick cracks covered parts of the dome, and it almost looked like the cracks were alive as they wiggled in an endless loop of getting damaged and trying to heal.

"What is this?" Zac muttered as he turned to his sister to see if she had any ideas.

"It's a prison for the Dimensional Seed!" Kenzie exclaimed. "The Administrator must have built it to protect the base from the energy emanations. I don't understand why it's in this hidden world though..."

“It looks like the treasure is trying to break out,” Ogras commented from the side as he glanced at Kenzie. “Meanwhile, that bastard is probably trying to break in, no? With your technical skills, we might actually be the first to make it to the Dimensional Seed.”