

The Fall 735

Chapter 735: Mountain Formation

The situation was grim, but it wasn't all bad. Where there was danger, there was also opportunity. Zac's cells suddenly came alive with greed while climbing, and he spotted a secluded cave not far away. He entered it cautiously after switching to his undead form, and he found himself face to face to a flower that had once juicy bulb at the top that reminded Zac of a dumpling.

It emitted an earthy aroma that was extremely enticing, but Zac forcibly ignored the primal hunger as he took out a jade box and harvested the thing. He couldn't recognize the plant at all, but his best guess was that it was some sort of native Dao Treasure judging by the aura it emitted, one of a far higher quality than the Life-Death Pearls.

It was definitely a treasure valuable enough to match anything a top 500 contestant on the Fate Plucking Ladder would be able to get from the vault, perhaps something even greater. Using it now was too risky considering he had been out of it for twenty days when ingesting the first round of Life-Death Pearls. Even passing out for an hour in this place might prove lethal.

Unfortunately, his grand plan hit a sudden and unexpected turn a day later; he had reached the peak of the mountain, and he was still far from the surface. In fact, it looked like the mountain had been broken off by the turbulent waters, and it had been turned into a mostly flat plateau a few kilometers across.

Swimming to the surface was still not an option. If anything, the currents were even stronger right at the summit, and Zac was forced to climb down some ways to not risk getting ripped off the mountain. Zac's only option was finding another mountain to climb, but he couldn't see any from his vantage. Worst-case scenario, he would have to descend the mountain until he found another one it connected to, but that would potentially waste weeks, if it was even possible.

There was one more thing he could do, and Zac spent two days traversing the side of the plateau until he finally spotted another mountain far in the distance.

The problem was the vast chasm between him and the target. Zac mulled on the conundrum while performing another cleansing Soul Strengthening Cycle, after which he started digging a larger-than-normal cave. It took a whole hour before he was finished, at which point he took out a large conic stone.

It came from one of the Spatial Rings of the cultivators he took out just before leaving Greengrove Archipelago, and it would become the sacrifice for this endeavor. He entered the vessel and thoroughly studied it before he loaded the array full of Supreme Nexus Crystals. Zac took a deep breath before he cranked the speed-controlling array to the limit.

The vessel shot out like a bullet from Zac's makeshift dock, and it hurtled straight toward the taller mountain in the distance. Steering was out of the question since he had completely overtaxed the array far beyond what it could sustain for long.

Ominous groans immediately started to echo through the hull, even with the shields working at max capacity. A Tremendous shudder made Zac lose his footing a moment later as a large section of the hull was ripped clean off. Thankfully, he had made it more than three quarters across the chasm before the ship was ripped apart, and he felt confident he'd be able to swim the last stretch.

However, he had severely underestimated just how strong the currents were, and he found himself rapidly dragged downward as he inched toward the peak. The amount of Miasma he was expelling to propel himself forward would be enough to drown out an army of F-grade warriors, but it wasn't a match to the intractable power that wanted to drag him to the depths.

Zac started to despair that days of effort would be wasted and that he might not even make it across at all, but he was confused to suddenly find the downward pull completely interrupted, allowing him to scramble toward the mountain. But Zac almost completely forgot to keep swimming as he glanced upward to see what was going on.

Something was swimming a few hundred meters over his head, its body stretching on for thousands of meters. Zac couldn't see exactly what it was, but he could barely discern dark green scales, each one as large as a football field by the looks of it.

What was this thing? And what was it doing in an E-grade trial? This big bastard would make even the dragon he fought look like a little shrimp. He wasn't even sure the mountain he had been climbing had been broken off by the currents any longer. This guy would only need to ram it once to get the work done.

Zac was frozen in fear and hesitation for only a second before he continued swimming toward the mountain, using as much energy as he dared without causing too large a ripple. The creature thankfully seemed completely disinterested in Zac even if he was spotted, and he managed to reach the mountain just in time before the thing passed him by.

In its wake came a tumultuous storm, and Zac barely managed to hold on to the cliff wall. His body was instantly covered in cuts, and he was forced to immediately cut a cubby to start resting again.

Meanwhile, the monstrosity was seemingly only passing by the area, and it rounded the mountain Zac climbed before it sunk toward the depths.

He never managed to see its face, but the beast best resembled some sort of overgrown sea snake since it neither had the fins of fish or wings or claws of a dragon. It was just an oversized tube ripping through the chasm, its massive trunk of a body turning the streams completely chaotic.

Zac rested up with his Soul Strengthening manual while keeping watch, but the gargantuan beast never made another appearance. Perhaps it lived even further down in the depths and only made the rounds now and then. Zac even guessed that thing was the true ruler of the Twilight Chasm, even though it hadn't been mentioned in any missive.

It was far beyond any normal beast king, to the point that Zac suspected it might be approaching Monarchy. Why such a thing existed inside the Mystic Realm was beyond Zac, and he could only endeavor to not draw its ire.

Zac soon started climbing again, but he found himself in a predicament after another two weeks. It looked like the section he had found himself in was a cluster of fifty-odd peaks, with the cliff he started on being slightly separated from them. He had managed to swim between these cliffs without sacrificing any more vessels, but it soon became apparent that most of these mountains didn't reach much further than the original one.

He had discerned what looked to be a much larger cliff or perhaps even the wall of the chasm, far in the distance, but the way there was extremely perilous. Not only was the distance almost four times as great between the closest peak and his earlier jump, but the streams were extremely powerful. He wasn't confident at all in making it across without the big snake helping out.

And even if he made it across in one piece, it was possible that he would also be dragged to such a depth that his methods to deal with the Twilight Energy wasn't enough.

Still, what else could he do?

He knew he would have to take the leap sooner or later if he wanted to get out of here, but he didn't go immediately. The peaks were all drenched in energy, and there were bound to be some treasures here. As long as he could make some sort of breakthrough, he'd increase his chances of survival when making it across. He immediately set out, but it was easier said than done finding anything down here.

For one, it was pitch black, and his other sights could only help him see so far. He spent one day per mountain peak, climbing around as much as he could in search of energy fluctuations or anything else that might indicate a valuable. And suddenly on the sixth day, he found something. It wasn't a precious metal, nor was it a unique plant hidden in a crevasse. It was a pristine five-meter-long bone that had been lodged in a crack.

Zac guessed it had been brought there by the currents rather than the fact that a beast lived down here since Twilight Energy this dense was no doubt poisonous to normal Beast Kings as well. The bone was still in the middle of an extraordinarily powerful stream, and that was one reason why Zac believed it might be a treasure.

A normal bone even from a D-grade beast would have eventually been ground to dust in a situation like this, but this one seemed to have no issue withstanding the cutting waters.

In fact, it almost looked like the waters were refining it. Zac had his suspicions, but he was currently in his human form so he couldn't be sure. He was trying to use the intuition gained by [Forester's Constitution] to find herbs, but he swapped over to his Draugr side after some thought as he hid from the stream in a secluded crevasse.

As expected, the moment he trained his abyssal eyes at the bone, he was almost blinded by the immense life-attuned energies it contained. The bone lit up like a beacon in the darkness. It was clear; the bone was somehow storing a bit of the life-attuned energies of the waters that passed while expelling some of the deathly energies.

Over who knows how many years, the bone had become a Treasure Bone of pure life. Zac wanted to immediately head over and pick it up, but he first had to spend the next hour cracking Miasma Crystals and expelling built-up energy. Only then did he set out, but he was surprised to find that the chains of [Love's Bond] weren't strong enough to dislodge the thing.

Zac wasn't deterred though, and he immediately moved to Plan B. The chains of [Love's Bond] slammed into the mountain wall or wrapped around a few outcroppings before he crawled over, securely fastened. Three small pygmies appeared in the waters behind him, but cracks immediately started to spread across their bones.

The skill would only last a few seconds before the surrounding energies ripped the skeletons apart, but that was enough. One barrier after another appeared to slightly divert the powerful current surrounding the bone, making it slightly easier for Zac to climb over. He saw that the bone had essentially fused with the mountain itself, and it was no wonder the chains had been unable to drag the bone over.

But the strength of nature was nothing in front of the power of Zac's greed, and he ripped it and a section of the mountain straight out of the crack with a herculean tug, and he quickly dragged himself back with the chains just as [Profane Exponents] crumbled. The bone entered his Spatial Ring, and Zac wasn't really surprised when he felt the wave of hunger in his mind.

Verun had woken up inside the ring, and it clearly indicated a desire to consume the mysterious bone. This was exactly what Zac had hoped for when snatching the Treasure Bone, but he didn't let Verun feed on it just yet. The axe wasn't really needed to solve his current predicament, but he couldn't let it absorb the bone right now.

Previously when Verun got something good, it had enclosed itself in large crystals to digest it, and this was no time for that.

Instead, he continued, and he managed to find three extremely impressive materials over the next two weeks. One was a metal that emitted intense energy fluctuations, yet wasn't listed in any of the precious materials missives. It had to be something extremely rare for that to be the case, and rare items were always good to have.

Neither of his Spirit Tools wanted it, but he might be able to use it to trade for something he did need in the future. After all, the absolute rarest items were rarely possible to buy with Nexus Coins alone, and many warriors preferred straight-up trades of similarly exotic materials.

He also found another one of those odd dumpling-like fruits, this one even slightly larger compared to the first. He still wasn't certain whether it was a Dao Treasure or something else though. His best bet was showing them to Catheya to see if she knew what they were.

The last ones were stalks of reed-like grass swaying in a secluded spot protected from the more powerful currents. Zac had almost been dragged out to the depths when he gazed upon them since their sway had an extremely potent hallucinogenic effect. It was only thanks to his evolved soul he barely managed to regain his sanity and desperately scramble back to the mountain before he was dragged away.

Harvesting them had been a challenge with him being constantly hypnotized, but the closer he came to them, the more he could sense that they would have an amazing effect on nurturing one's soul. They were his best find so far, and he planned on simply eating them unless he found something looking more promising to help him out.

However, he suddenly spotted something extremely mysterious, something that smelled of opportunity. Zac was climbing a mountain as usual, when there suddenly was a weird fluctuation in the distance. A whole mountain suddenly flickered into existence before disappearing again in just a few seconds. It was almost like he had seen a mirage, but he could soon confirm it was real.

He wouldn't have noticed anything if he hadn't seen the mountain for a brief window, but now that he knew it was there, he could see how the powerful currents swirled around it. It wasn't phasing in or out

of reality, but it was rather shrouded by some unknown method. Zac frowned as he looked around at the mountain peaks, realizing that the hidden mountain was right in the middle of the cluster he was currently exploring.

A Natural Formation?

He immediately dug a cubby and started up another round of soul cultivation, keeping watch over the secret peak. The mountain reappeared twice in a span of ten hours, and it was preceded by a mounting surge of energy each time. There was also a hint of spatial energy in the mix, making Zac wonder if space was sealed, but a weakness appeared every once in a while.

If he wanted to enter the mountain, it would probably have to be in that brief window. Zac had already decided over the past hours; he would take his chances and enter that place. The soul grass he harvested was nice, but not enough to reach his second Reincarnation. Absorbing them wasn't sufficient to give him the power to reach the wall of the chasm, he needed to take a risk and check things out in that place.

Zac made his preparations over the next day, ignoring the mountain as it appeared four more times. Soon enough, he shot out in another of his spare vessels, this one having over a hundred talismans plastered to its hull. That was the limit of what he could activate without completely draining himself, and the vessel was lit up like a sun as it pierced through the frantic currents just as the energy of the hidden peak started to surge.

The whole ship shook and started to fall apart as it slammed into an unseen barrier, but Zac was ready. Only a third of the talismans had been defensive ones to deal with the current without the ship crumbling, and the rest simultaneously lit up to create a tremendous explosion, and it was quickly followed by a massive axe cutting through the waters.

It was [Arcadia's Judgement], and not even the terrifying pressure of the ocean could withstand the wooden hand as it ripped open a tear in an unseen shield. Zac knew he couldn't hesitate, and a patch of flowers appeared beneath his feet as he shot forward, passing right by his own attack and forcing himself through the temporary weakness in the natural formation.

He had expected to find the mountain he had seen on the other side, but his eyes widened in terror when he was actually met with a chaotic storm of spatial energies. He didn't even have a chance to orient himself before he found his surroundings twist. Thankfully he hadn't been swallowed by the void, but rather transported to some unknown cave.

The cave was drained, and Zac took a deep breath with wonder as he looked around. The ground was littered with all kinds of things that had most likely been dragged here just like himself, and there was everything from ancient corpses, cultivators and beasts alike, to large chunks of metal and soil.

In fact, the materials here were even more plentiful than all he had gathered himself so far. Unfortunately, there was something odd going on, where the older materials seemed to have been drained somehow, including an identical piece of metal as the one he had found the other day.

As for the culprit for that and him getting dragged here, there was one clear suspect - the flowers.

They were the only thing that seemed to grow in the cave naturally, and they absolutely covered both ceiling and walls. Their alluring aroma was simply amazing, but that was the least impressive thing about them. First of all, the density of Twilight Energy was pitifully low in this place, to the point that Zac wouldn't even need to use his Soul Strengthening Array to get by here.

There was only one way something like this was possible; these flowers were continuously swallowing exorbitant amounts of energy, enough to drain the whole area to the point that only a trickle remained. They were even so voracious they somehow dragged materials from the outside to be absorbed.

Then again, it wasn't certain that these flowers actually swallowed all the energies themselves. Intense spatial fluctuations were coming from this place, making Zac wonder if these flowers had formed some sort of natural formation that sent the Twilight Energy to the void just like they had teleported him and all these materials here.

He walked over to the closest one and inspected it, and he felt like he could discard any theory that the spatial fluctuations came from some other source. The flowers themselves held extremely condensed powers of the space, and miniature cracks actually appeared in space when Zac brushed one of its petals.

The movement increased the fluctuations by another tier, and Zac felt his body waking up, greedily swallowing the energy the flower released. He had no idea what species of flowers he was looking at, and his missive couldn't help him either. However, he could tell with absolute certainty that whatever these flowers were called, they worked wonders on his constitution.

Zac knew that he had found it. He had found the opportunity to make another breakthrough, and it was one he had been holding back on for a long time now.

It was time to push his bloodline to E-grade.