

The Fall 239

Chapter 239: Through the Tunnels

Zac glared in the direction of where he was thrown from, but there was nothing there apart from a rough rock wall. There wasn't any sign of the portal or the elaborate chambers of Anzonil, and he might as well be in any random caverns of a mountain.

Zac sighed in disappointment as he got to his feet. There were a lot of topics that he wanted to broach with the old man, even if he decided to undergo the trial. But perhaps staying in corporeal form as an Array Spirit required a lot of energy or something, forcing the old man to send Zac away quickly.

He really wanted to know just what the darkness was, and if Anzonil knew of the method to kill the specters. After speaking with the old man he had a feeling that the darkness was directly linked with the demise of the Eastern Trigram Sect back in the day.

That the old man knew of the Draugr also piqued his interest, though that wasn't as important at the moment. But it looked like he needed to know more about his undead race since having what was called a royal bloodline might both be a blessing and a curse.

In any case, there wasn't much to do here. He was currently in a dead-end of a subterranean tunnel, and there was only one way to go. The instructions were pretty clear as well; reach the end of the road and you'll get the treasure.

Zac kept the shield fastened to his left arm, hefting [Verun's Bite] in the other as he started to walk down the winding path. There were no crystals giving off light in this place, but the tunnel was thankfully not completely shrouded in darkness.

There was quite a high density of Cosmic Energy in the tunnel, which sustained some of the glowing moss that also grew in his own mountain. It was amazing to Zac how plants learned to live only off of Cosmic Energy and could survive even in the most desolate places with only that as a source of sustenance. But in Zac's undead form the high density of energy wasn't a blessing, but rather a curse.

The more Cosmic Energy in the atmosphere the worse it felt, and here it was like the very air around him was trying to destroy him. Usually the ambient energy in the air wasn't a problem for him, but he guessed that he was either inside a gathering array or close to a Nexus Vein.

It finally got to the point that he took out a couple of his Miasma Crystals and stuffed them inside his robe to feel the cold energies within against his skin. It helped a bit, and it was with relief he sensed that the density of energy around him was quickly decreasing as he walked further along the path.

However, it wasn't all good news since he once again started to sense the insidious energy of the darkness, though it still was minute. But Zac still kept going forward. He wouldn't give up his chance at supreme treasure just by a hint of the malicious energy, and he strode forward with purpose until he finally reached the end of the tunnel.

Zac soundlessly advanced the last 50 meters to the exit, and peeked out the tunnel. The first thing he noticed was that there was over a drop of over fifteen meters down to the floor from his egress. The second thing he saw was the sea of rats.

He immediately realized there must be some sort of array that hid his passage and blocked out any sound as he looked down. He gazed upon a chaotic swarm of rats that fought, mated, and scuttled about without him hearing a single sound.

Most of the rats he saw were the very same type that he had already killed throngs of on the surface, but he realized that he had likely only fought the weakest of the brood so far. There were far larger rats lumbering about as well, a few of which emanated enough power that they might be E-grade, though barely.

Zac's eyes lit up at the veritable feast of prey, but he slowly observed everything for another full fifteen minutes before moving. He wanted to see if there was something like a rat king that could be a threat, but if there was it didn't live in this large cavern.

He mouthed a silent prayer before jumping down, but he didn't try to conceal his presence. On the contrary, he entered the huge cavern with a roar, slamming down tens of meters away from the exit with a huge crash.

He had imbued himself with the Dao of Heaviness, and he was like a ten-ton hammer when he landed, killing every rat within over ten meters and creating a large crater. The moment he had exited the passage he had been inundated by a cacophony of screeches and hisses, and it got a lot worse after he made his entrance.

Zac didn't even have time to get to his feet before he received a surge of energy into his forehead, and he immediately understood that he had accomplished his goal. The quest for his second skill, [Fields of Despair] was finished. It required him to draw the ire of over a thousand enemies simultaneously, and he had likely passed that goal ten times over with his flashy entrance.

He didn't really know whether to be happy or angry that there wasn't an accompanying Dao Vision to go along with his newly acquired skill. He remembered very well the feeling when he killed the thousand barghest required to complete his quest for [Axe Mastery].

Completing the quest had formed the Axe fractal in his chest, but it was missing in his undead form just like the normal skills. When he had focused on it he had been brought to the desolate world with the enormous axe. Meanwhile, his new skill only added a pure skill-fractal on his forehead.

But it was a welcome boost to his very limited repertoire in his Draugr form, and he had just the perfect stage to test his new ability. But he was beset by frenzied rats before he even had time to even form a battle plan.

However, while most of the rats down in the cave were larger than their brethren on the surface they were of no threat to Zac. After a few quick swings with his axe thirty corpses lay strewn around him. But Zac frowned as he looked down at his axe, and after a brief pause decided to stash the axe into his Sack.

He didn't want to rely on combat skills he gained with his other class too much since that might negatively impact the growth of his Undying Bulwark class. Instead, he decided to fight using the means his class provided for as long as possible, only relying on his axe and his Daos if needed.

The first thing he did was to unleash [Fields of Despair], and the space around him actually changed a bit. It was as though the world had gone monochrome within fifty meters from his position, and it reminded him of how it looked when he fought the Corpse Lord.

In fact, he noticed that the Cosmic Energy around him was actually turning into Miasma at a visible rate, and a mist of the deathly energy swirled around him. However, the production came at a cost of his own energy, so the skill wouldn't be very useful for cultivation.

But that wasn't the point of the skill, and Zac was elated after having figured out the workings of the skill. It was a debuffing skill with a large area, and its effect was pretty great.

It lowered the attributes of his enemies by a certain degree across the board. After turning it off and on again while fighting with the rats for a minute he estimated the number to be around 10%.

Taking away 10% of the fighting power of all close-by enemies wasn't a huge amount, but it wasn't bad. Besides, the skill was only at early stage and it already had many uses.

For example, it could negate almost half of the effect of skills like his [Hatchetman's Rage] without having any of the other skill's disadvantages. It could also lower the power of an ultimate attack from his enemies by a decent degree, increasing his survivability.

But there was a pretty big drawback to this skill. [Fields of Despair] didn't have a great synergy with his other skill, [Deathwish]. To kill his enemies he needed to get hit, and the harder he got hit the more damage he returned. If he restricted the power of his enemies he would also restrict his offensive power.

Then again, the two skills were used in different ways, and he wasn't surprised that Undying Bulwark's skills sacrificed offensive power in favor of more defense. It was a tank-class after all. But these many defensive measures weren't needed against rats, even if there was a seemingly endless horde of them.

But before he deactivated [Fields of Despair] he noticed another huge advantage of the skill. As he had experimented for a bit with the skill there lay a new slew of rat carcasses around him, and those that died first were starting to emit a turquoise mist.

Zac immediately realized it was miasma, and he didn't shy away when the mists were drawn toward him as though they were guided. The energy effortlessly merged with his existing stores of miasma, giving him back even more energy than he used when killing the rats.

This clearly differed from how it worked when he fought the beasts on Mystic Island. Back then it worked the same as in his human form. When he killed something he received a boost of energy that went toward improving his levels, but the effect on his expended storage of miasma was minuscule.

But this was different. The energy that streamed toward him from more and more corpses didn't help him with his levels, but they restored the miasma he was continuously expending to power his two skills.

He finally understood the full effect of his new skill, and it truly was a field of despair for his enemies. Not only did it weaken those who came too close, it even restored his energies to allow him to keep fighting for an indefinite time.

He quickly changed his mind about turning the skill off, and instead he kept both his skills going. Both of them were continuously drawing from his miasma reserves, but with new rat corpses being added all the time he quickly restored the energy he expended.

In the end he lost slightly more energy than he gained from the corpses, but he would fall from lack of sleep before lack of miasma at this rate. Then again he was only fighting weak beasts at the moment, as the larger rats hadn't entered the fray yet.

Since he'd already gained one of the skills he decided to grind out his second one as well, but he soon found out it wasn't as easy as he had hoped. Not all the rats were strong enough to attack him with enough force to progress his quest.

But he quickly found a solution as he took out his axe once again. There was a pretty clear correlation between the power and size of these rats, and he soon found that the rats needed to be at least three meters long to be able to bite or swipe with enough force to award a point of progress in his class.

Everything smaller than that approached him was quickly culled with a swipe of his axe, while he kept blocking the attacks of the larger ones with his shield. Some wounds were starting to accumulate on his body since he wasn't able to block all the strikes, but he didn't care since his high Endurance and Vitality had no problem in keeping him alive.

It didn't take long for him to gain a level since the rats were almost as strong as the beasts on Mystic Island. But the beasts back there had been spread out, each occupying its own territory. Here they were everywhere, and no matter where Zac looked he saw a sea of experience points approaching him.

It was also clear that these beasts had no intention of backing down, even after hundreds of their kin lay lifeless on the floor. Zac soon realized that it might be because they were affected by the darkness.

He didn't believe all these animals were possessed like what happened to some cultivators up on the surface. The energies of the darkness had rather slowly seeped into their minds while they lived underground, increasing their aggression.

But Zac didn't mind, and he soon settled into a familiar routine ingrained into his bones from the beast waves. He was already quickly climbing on the Hunter ladder again, even though he mainly focused on progressing the quest for [Bulwark Mastery].

The moment he blocked the final attack with his shield he felt a huge surge of energy in his heart. It didn't kick-start it to start beating even in his undead form, but it was rather that something occupied its empty chambers. Zac couldn't stop a wide smile from spreading on his face when he realized what it was.

It was another Dao Fractal, just like the tree or the axe in his Hatchetman form. But he didn't dare to check the form or nature of the fractal any closer since he was afraid he'd get sucked inside a vision while there was a sea of rats still rampaging around him.

But he got extremely impatient to end the fight so that he could gain his fourth Dao Seed, so he no longer held anything back or cared about fighting with his shield only. He became a whirlwind of carnage as he rampaged across the enormous den, and soon the elated growls from [Verun's Bite] overpowered the screeches of the frenzied rats.

