

## The Fall 245

### Chapter 245: Indomitable

The miasma was roiling inside his body as Zac surveyed the battleground. Broken carapaces and shells were strewn all over, and it was impossible to take a step without putting his feet in a blue puddle of ant blood.

He made a cursory check for anything of value as he walked toward the only passage that didn't seem to be created by tunneling ants. After he had managed to reflect some of the ultimate attack of the hive queen the fight was mostly over.

She seemed to be afraid to attack him again, and that hesitation allowed him to get close enough to finish the fight with his axe. A few quick chops and she was dead. Luckily killing the queen had the effect he hoped for, and the rest of the ants had turned completely insane in their anger, desperately trying to kill him.

He had made a few discoveries during this battle that helped him understand the strength and shortcomings of his new skill. The good was that the defensive properties of [Immutable Bulwark] were extremely high.

It also seemed to differ from how [Chop] worked. That skill was based on the actual weapon he used, so when he changed weapons so did the strength of the fractal edge change. But his new defensive skill was different. It didn't look anything like his shield, and his actual shield took no damage when [Immutable Bulwark] was attacked. He was, however, unable to summon the skill if he didn't have a shield equipped, so they were connected somehow.

Zac guessed that the power was based on his Endurance, like [Nature's Barrier], since it wasn't based on his actual weapon. The miasma consumption was also based on how much the shield was attacked, just like an array.

He had also learned some new things about [Deathwish]. It did not appear that it worked on mental skills since the queen had no reaction after attacking him multiple times with the mental waves. This was something Zac had seen as a possibility before.

In fact, there were multiple means of attack where he suspected the skill wouldn't work. Illusions and poison were two other examples. It appeared that there needed to be a kinetic component to the attack, such as a punch or a fireball for there to be anything to reflect.

The battle had also given him three new levels, two of which came from killing the queen. It was crazy to think he had gained ten levels in just one day, but he also noted that the speed was already slowing down markedly.

He almost wished there would be a few more rooms like this before he got to the treasure. There was no real threat to him, and he could generally treat it as rooms full of experience points. However, his worry grew as the corruption in the atmosphere around him kept increasing.

Even the flora in the tunnel he was starting to become twisted and odd, even though the corruption in the tunnels was far lower compared to the caverns for some reason. Perhaps the array screens that hid the tunnels he used also stopped some of the darkness from passing through.

But even then the effect on the plant life was noticeable. Some of them even produced an odd black substance, and Zac collected some of it in case it could be useful or valuable. However, there was clearly something wrong with the black liquid. He accidentally got a few drops on his hand while he was collecting it, and in just moments he felt rage bubbling up inside him.

It was only a few minutes later that the urge to go crazy and destroy everything around him subsided and Zac was shocked by the effect. Just what would happen if some beast ate these plants on a daily basis?

Zac's wish for more beasts to kill were soon fulfilled as he came to yet another cavern, this one occupied by things that looked like fuzzy scorpions. The battle took around two hours, and he almost got himself killed due to carelessness.

There had actually been a boss hiding beneath the ground all the time, and Zac only realized his mistake when his danger sense warned him of the incoming enormous stinger. He had barely managed to swirl around and block the strike in time.

Time started to blur and hours turned to days as Zac cleansed one cave after another. Zac started to worry that the old array spirit was taking him on a tour in a circle that spanned the whole mountain range. Or perhaps he was walking straight toward the edge that the System had imposed on the hunt.

The darkness was also ever-present around him, and it even started to affect his mood to a slight degree. He found himself constantly harboring murderous impulses that he had to forcibly push down. Only entering a tunnel after a cavern gave his mind some reprieve, as the arrays truly seemed to be darkness filters.

The critters he killed were also turning increasingly insane, and they also started to exhibit various deformities from the corruption. Zac was currently fighting against the patriarch of a cavern that was inhabited by roughly a hundred huge lizards.

Each one of them was close to the E-Grade, but they looked like they were barely alive since they were covered in grisly scars and pus-filled tumors. Some had grown odd appendages and others seemed barely coherent enough to take care of itself.

Zac finally felled the beast, and a surge of Cosmic Energy brought him to level 48. He was only twelve levels away from his main class now, and it proved just how efficient it was to hunt E-Grade beasts to level.

Just the past two days he had killed more E-Grade beings than he had during the first six months of the integration which had skyrocketed his levels. However, the things he had encountered could barely be counted as E-Grade, provided far less Cosmic Energy than the Star Ox for example.

He felt that the speed of gaining levels was slowing down, just like it had with his main class. But he still was extremely satisfied with the result. His time down in the tunnels had also proven an extremely efficient way to grind his position on the hunter ladder, and he had already back jumped up to the 6th position.

His gatherer ladder was steady dropping though, and he was down at the 9th position now. He had seen multiple names in the top 50 disappear, likely meaning desperate battles were taking place aboveground which was quickly consolidating the wealth.

There was nothing of value down here, and he could only pin his hope to Anzonil's treasure trove. Zac took a last look around the cavern for anything that might be of value, but as usual it was just disgusting carcasses.

But his brows furrowed when he saw that the leader lizard suddenly started shaking, and the next moment a ghostly specter shot out of it with a screech. It made a beeline for Zac, its claws already poised to strike.

Zac readied his axe to meet the incoming ghost, but at the last moment, he had an idea. He quickly moved his axe as he infused himself with the Dao of Hardness. The ghost unhesitantly tried to rake his chest, but it suddenly shrieked in anger and pain when a copy of itself suddenly attacked it.

It tried to swing right back, but the moment after the spectral projection from [Deathwish] had attacked it turned to nothingness. The specter seemed completely enraged and tried venting its anger on Zac.

It quickly unleashed a barrage of attacks on Zac, but between his robes, his Endurance, and his Dao it only felt like someone was scratching him. But the same couldn't be said about the specter. It howled in pain with every strike, and the pain seemed to make it even more desperate as it even tried to bite Zac's head.

Zac had to force himself to stay still, and a small stream of cosmic energy the next moment told him his gambit had been a success. He already knew that [Deathwish] returned the same type of energy as the original attack, though it was formed by miasma, so he surmised that if specters could kill themselves then so could he with the skill.

It turned out he was correct, and it was as though a stone had lifted from his chest. If he could actually kill the ghosts by just standing still then he didn't really have much to worry about unless there were some stronger ghosts that they hadn't encountered aboveground.

The piercing wail came to mind, for example. Zac had no doubt that being was E-Graded, and he did not want to test whether his endurance or that thing's power was greater. It had managed to scramble his brains momentarily from god knows what distance, so he couldn't imagine a battle in melee range going his way.

Still, it was with newfound vigor he pushed toward the next cave, and the persistent aura of darkness didn't feel as oppressive any longer. However, more and more ghosts started to appear in the caves, all of them hiding in the stronger beasts.

Zac surmised that they perhaps were draining the energy of those they possessed, and used the powerful animals as personal feeding grounds. He already knew that they were in need of Cosmic Energy to survive going by the thousands of ghosts that had assailed him on the mountain top.

The more frequently appearing ghosts proved they weren't all harmless to him as well. One had managed to slink into his mind just like the last time, and he barely was able to force it out by madly channeling the Dao of Hardness.

It was lucky too, as the ghost had unhesitatingly tried to use Zac arm to sever his own legs with [Verun's Bite]. It was by the hair that he managed to stop himself from amputating his leg, and sweat was running down his forehead from the close call.

After that he no longer dared to let the ghosts freely have at him, and instead had his eyes peeled in case they tried to possess him again. The moment he suspected that was what one of the ghosts planned he immediately slashed it with his axe, briefly scattering it and enraging it.

But that also drastically slowed down his speed of killing the things, and it was quickly getting hard to keep track of all the ghosts as they grew more numerous in the caverns. So worry started to grow as the situation was growing more and more strained.

Finally it got so bad that he started wondering whether he even dared to keep going. Dozens of ghosts were wailing in the cave that once housed yet another rat den. They were frenziedly trying to get at him, and Zac had to keep running as he sorted out which ones were attacking and which ones tried to possess him.

He already knew that putting his back against a wall had no effect, the ghosts could easily pass through them. Even his newly attained defensive skill proved useless against the spectral beings, and they simply flew right around it without being impeded.

But suddenly he gained a surge of energy as yet another ghost killed itself by clawing his chest, and Zac opened up his menu like a drowning man. The surge of power in his body told him that he had finally reached level 50, which meant that he should have gotten a new class quest.

What type of skill he attained and how easily he could complete the quest would dictate whether he would keep going or not. At this rate, he might get possessed at any moment, as there already had been a few close calls the last caverns.

Indomitable (Class): Attain a high stage defensive Dao Seed. Reward: Indomitable (1/1)

Zac couldn't help but get his hopes up when he saw the name, but he refocused on the ghosts and slowly whittled them down so that he could focus on the new skill uninterrupted. He still waited on a second Dao Vision, since he still had only got the one.

Alyn had told him that higher rarity classes got more Dao visions, but Zac guessed reality might not be that simple when he noted that Indomitable was yet another normal class quest. Perhaps he had gained one higher-grade vision that awarded multiple seeds rather than multiple weaker ones.

That would in a sense ensure that the seeds he gained would have a good synergy since they came from the same individual. But whether he was correct or not wasn't important at the moment, and instead he focused on the skill. Luckily the quest seemed to count Seed of Trees as a defensive Dao since the quest was already considered finished. He quickly accepted it and he felt a new fractal taking place in his mind.

Zac was elated since the placement was almost exactly identical to the one of [Mental Fortress], which together with its name gave a pretty clear indication of what type of skill it was.

It seemed his luck had pulled through for him once again.