

The Fall 414

Chapter 414: Ill-Gotten Gains

A brief bout of darkness shrouded Zac's vision until he was thrown into the next world. However, the System seemed intent of making the entrances rough ones going forward, and he barely had time to see a moonlit sky and a couple of candles before he fell into a pool of steaming water with his head first.

Zac sputtered as he tried to orient himself in the water, and he soon realized that he had luckily only fallen into a heated pool or hot spring that was a meter or so deep. He had first been afraid that he had been dropped into a pot of soup of some giant or something, but even if he was safe from that fate he still immediately got to his feet and looked around for any looming threats.

"You! Who are you!" a shriek echoed with enough force to make Zac's eardrums vibrate. "AND WHAT ARE YOU HOLDING?!"

Similar shrieks echoed from the vicinity, meaning that the others had likely encountered similar fates. As for the source of the voice, it was an extremely alluring woman with a pair of pointed ears. She wasn't a Tal-Eladar though but more closely resembling the traditional elves in the stories on earth.

Apart from the more generous curves, that is.

The elf stood in the water as well just a few meters away, completely exposed except for a thin layer of lather. It seemed that Zac had been dropped into her courtyard mid-bath, effectively creating an instant grudge with. She was a cultivator as well since Cosmic Energy was already churning around her, though his instincts told him there was no way she was the guardian of the level due to the lacking density of her aura.

Zac froze in shock for a second as he took in the amazing scenery until he realized that he should probably try to explain himself. But he didn't even have time to open his mouth before shouts from soldiers could be heard approaching and massive drums started beating in the distance. It was no doubt a response to the shrieks that had echoed to the high heavens just now.

[Escape with your ill-gotten gains. Note: Hiding your loot will count as forfeiting the quest.]

'What fucking gains?' Zac inwardly groaned as he looked down at his hands.

His already scrambled head got even more confused when he realized that the massive array flags he was carrying had been replaced by a piece of white frilly fabric. Wasn't that...?

Zac's eyes widened slightly and he looked up at the infuriated elf who had somehow covered herself with what looked like thunderclouds. Their eyes met and the air started crackle from lightning as the woman's eyes started to light up with some unknown power.

The common-sense thing would have been to give back the underwear, but Zac obviously couldn't do that. The system had for some insane reason sent him on a panty-raid, and if he threw away the 'treasure' he would probably fail the trial.

So he could only stifle his complaints as he took out [Verun's Bite] again, but instead of targeting the elf he cut a massive hole in the wall. Luckily the outdoor bathhouse didn't seem fortified from the inside, making it easy to escape.

Better yet the girl seemed to prioritize getting dressed over killing him, and she interrupted whatever attack she had been charging up to instead flash toward a dress hanging across a rack right next to the pool. It allowed Zac to slip away with the help of [Loamwalker], but he only used the skill a couple of times before he stopped and took stock of what was going on.

Zac realized he was halfway up a mountain, and he guessed he either was inside a sect or some sort of town. Bamboo stalks and trees ran along the mountainside, while small lamps emitting a warm light was studded along the path created with large slabs of stones. There were stronger lights among the trees when Zac gazed both up and down the mountain, and he guessed it was courtyards nestled into nature.

It was truthfully one of the most beautiful sceneries he had seen, and he wanted to take in everything as quickly as possible. It would be perfect if he could turn the mountains on his islands into a tranquil paradise like this after the invaders were dealt with. The money he could make from renting out properties like this would be amazing.

But Zac only got a few seconds to drink in the beauty before the sound of rapid steps took him out of his reverie.

"Halt!" a voice could be heard from behind, but Zac ignored it as he gazed into the sky for any flares.

"Now this is more like it!" another voice hollered, and Zac looked over to see that at least one of his companions was fine.

It was Ogras who ran toward him as his shadows knocked out a couple of guards that were hot in pursuit. He was also soaked wet, but it looked like his mission was a bit different from his own as his arms were gripping a veritable mountain of clothes.

"You were given that many to steal?" Zac exclaimed with surprise.

"Well, no. I only got the one pair. But since we've already stolen the eggs we might as well steal the hen, you know?" the demon laughed, his eyes glistening with excitement. "They will make nice gifts if we can keep them, these are high-quality items."

"Well that's just great," Zac said as he knocked out a guard who tried to intercept their escape. "Have you seen any flare?"

"Nope," Ogras said, but he nodded toward a courtyard beneath them. "I heard screams in that direction as well though."

Zac nodded and started running, and after some thought, he took the pair of panties and tried to tie it around his wrist like a bandana. But the flimsy material turned out to be surprisingly slippery, and after failing multiple times he could only resort to a second option with some defeat.

He put them on his head like a cap.

"Not bad," The demon nodded in appreciation. "Heavy taste. Just like when we met the first time."

"Just freeing up my hands," Zac sighed. "Hiding them in a bag will probably fail the quest."

"Whatever you say," the demon snorted.

This whole floor felt like a sick joke. Was the System messing with him? Or was there perhaps some bored Stargazer in charge of operations who decided to play around a bit and create weird scenarios?

A wail from just ahead told them that they had found their target, flare or no flare. A quick [Chop] broke through a wall, and they found themselves in a similar spa as the one Zac started in. It seemed like the mountain had dozens of private hot springs along the mountain-side, each with its own accompanying mansion. Perhaps it was a hotel rather than a sect?

They immediately found Galau curled into a ball while four scantily clad women were brutally beating him with sticks and fists as he desperately clung to a few pieces of fabric. But it was clear that the assailants weren't that strong, and the wounds weren't lethal.

"Lucky guy," Ogras whistled. "I just got the one."

Zac snorted before he unleashed his accumulated killing intent as he rushed over with his axe waving in the air. The elven ladies immediately retreated with fear when they sensed his strength, but Zac obviously wasn't there to kill them.

He rather grabbed the balled-up Galau and flashed back to the demon's side in an instant, and Zac couldn't help rolling his eyes when he noticed that the demon's laundry pile had noticeably increased in size.

"What's the matter with you?" Ogras spat as he kicked the butt of the still curled-up youth. "Act like a man. Would you let yourself get castrated and killed if we didn't drop by?"

"I'm sorry," Galau stammered. "I did not expect the tower to conjure such a- what are you two doing?"

Galau's eyes went back and forth between Ogras with his huge pile of women's garments and Zac who stoically wore a pair of panties like a hat. His face was going through a tumultuous change of emotions, and it looked like he was seeing his two travel companions for the first time. Zac only grunted and indicated Galau to start running down the mountain.

"Look at you," Ogras said with some disdain as they fled. "Calling yourself a merchant, yet you lack a nose for opportunity. Look at Zac wearing his ill-gotten gains with such gusto. Where in the outside world can you live large like that without being captured and strung up in the city square?"

Annoyance surged as Zac fought off the incoming guards who seemed hellbent on preventing them from descending the mountain. But he knew he wouldn't win a verbal spar with the wily demon, so he could only keep pushing forward while keeping the complaints in his heart. A few of the guards were some ways into the E-Grade, but they quickly and ruthlessly swept aside by a Zac fueled by anger and embarrassment.

The description of the quest wasn't clear, but it felt to Zac that this whole mountain belonged to some force, and to escape meant to leave the mountain. He wasn't sure if they also needed to throw off the pursuit, but one step at the time.

A horde of irate cultivators was hot on their heels, but Zac breathed in relief when he sensed that there were no people in the angry mob who could be considered real threats to their lives. He still didn't want to fight them though, as he felt like these people weren't meant to be killed, like civilians on regular levels.

Killing a few of them might result in some old monster on the summit descending as well, and then they would truly be in deep shit. Zac instead chose to rely on the small mountain of projectiles in his cosmos Sack, and one piece of rock after another appeared in his hand before they shout out with pinpoint precision.

He even chose to use normal stones instead of his specially prepared cannonballs as the targets were around peak F-Grade and might actually die if he threw the clumps of metal. But the stones only created an impact that threw the guards away without creating any mortal wounds.

Luckily they had acted extremely quickly, and most of the people were behind them rather than in front. Zac had been out the bath he started in within 20 seconds, and they had brought Galau away in under a minute. The quick escape had allowed them to gain a decent headstart, making their lives a lot easier.

Between Ogras' shadow teleportations and Zac's [Loamwalker] they had no problem keeping the lead, and they smashed one hastily erected defensive line after another. The real trial only arrived at the foot of the mountain, as a massive array lit up that covered the whole area.

"Won't be too strong from the inside," Ogras muttered. "At the same time?"

Zac nodded and a massive fractal edge immediately took shape along the blade of [Verun's Bite]. Since it was just an array they targeted, rather than some innocent guard, Zac had no problem infusing the axe with the Fragment of the Axe. The fractal blade turned a deep grey as new fractals appeared along the edge, and its aura quickly became a lot denser.

It was a small change that the Dao Fragment imparted upon the skill, and Zac found it not only made the skill deadlier, but it also seemed more durable. Ogras' followed suit and prepared a strike, though he couldn't use his hands as they were still occupied with his 'treasures'.

Instead the shadows all around them started to shudder as they slithered toward the demon like he was some sort of shadow magnet, and in just a second it looked like the ground around Ogras was pitch-black.

"Go," Zac muttered when they were 100 meters away from the shield, and he launched the fractal blade in one fluid motion.

The blade ripped through the air and slammed into the sect-protecting shield in an instant. Huge cracks spread all along the green barrier, but before it had a chance to regenerate a thick beam of shadows completely crushed it, which created a large enough passage for them to easily slip through.

The area outside the mountain was completely barren, and there was nowhere to hide for kilometers in any direction. Zac figured that was probably intentional, and any vegetation would get culled so that the guards would have a clean line of sight in case any hostile forces approached.

"Do you have anything to shroud the area?" Ogras asked as he looked back at the mob that still hadn't given up and streamed out from the shield with murder in their eyes.

"I- yes!" Galau said as he produced a glass ball full of a purple haze. "This one will spread a harmless mist across a pretty massive area. But enough force will blow it away in a minute or two."

"That's good enough," Ogras nodded. "Use it."

Galau nodded and infused the ball with Cosmic Energy, which made a huge billowing cloud spread out in all directions. The purple haze reminded Zac of the time he poisoned half the demon army and himself with the massive cauldron, and he couldn't help but shudder at the memory.

Luckily the irate mob also got a bit hesitant after seeing the massive mist, and many stopped in their tracks or even fled to avoid getting swallowed inside.

"Let's go," Ogras said when they were completely covered, and a transparent tentacle landed on Zac's shoulder.

Just a few moments later they were long gone, and Ogras panted a bit with exertion. He had taken them a shocking distance in a quick succession of teleports, something that Zac's current attainments of [Loamwalker] would be unable to do.

Galau reacted quickly the moment Ogras stopped moving the three, and he sprinkled some white dust over himself and the other two.

"Anti-tracking dust," the merchant explained. "Just in case."

Zac nodded in understanding as he looked around.

"What now?"

"Let's keep moving," Ogras shrugged. "The Ruthless Heavens should indicate when it considers us having gotten away."

His words were proven right twenty minute and a huge distance later, as they stumbled upon a teleporter as they crossed a small river in an alien forest.

Zac sighed as he stowed away his only loot from the floor, before he got ready for another fresh hell to welcome them.