

## **The Fall 270**

### **Chapter 270: Riverleaf**

Riverleaf sighed as she looked at the ravaged forest outside their town. The trees that their ancestors had tended for hundreds of years were gone, replaced with burnt-out husks, and the farms were turned into ruins and war trenches. As the shaman of their village, she sensed the pain of nature around them.

They had truly underestimated these foreign invaders. For months they had been battling for territory, neither side showing a clear advantage. The invaders might have been the strongest force in the area, but they were surrounded by over a Dozen towns who worked together to keep them at bay. But something had changed a week ago.

In just a day five towns were destroyed, their populations killed to the last man apart from the lucky few who managed to escape in time. Even the elderly and the children weren't spared, and their scouts had recounted scenes straight out of a nightmare. From there those black golems had started their crusade, destroying one town after another. The Invaders had clearly been holding back until now.

She couldn't help but wonder if there were traitors among them. Did the invaders know that their top hunters were unavailable or dead due to the hunt? They had worked so hard to maintain a mirage of normalcy, risking their lives to keep the pressure on the Incursions. But it was all for naught as they went into a rampage while their strongest warriors were occupied with the hunt.

Everwood Refuge was only still standing because the invaders had started in the other direction, methodically working their way from city to city. Her first instinct had been to flee, but she knew that they couldn't do that. The beats around were much too dangerous. Besides, if they fled they would give up their ancestral homes.

Using the teleporter wasn't a real option either, not to their force at least. It was just much too expensive to send someone through that miraculous gate. Even if her husband had returned with enormous gains it was far from enough for the whole city. They could afford to teleport a few hundred at the most, only a fraction of the two hundred thousand who lived in their town. They couldn't even afford to send all the children to safety.

Her eyes turned to her husband, desperately fighting against the rockmen. They were beyond sturdy. Not even the chief of the hunt managed to quickly kill those things in a one-on-one battle, which was a clear indicator of how the rest of the soldiers fared. Worse yet, they couldn't even use their fortifications to their advantage. The rockmen had made quick work of their protective shield and rampart with their huge boulders, and in less than 20 minutes it was gone.

The moment they saw that their shield wouldn't hold they had made their teleporter public in a desperate bid to enlist some help against their threat. She had been elated to see people come through their gate earlier, but most had quickly disappeared again after learning of the situation.

Only a few remained, though it was clear that they were mostly interested in fishing in the muddy waters. She had even been forced to send some soldiers to prevent looting from unscrupulous guests. But suddenly she saw one of the young hunters-in-training speed toward her with elation in his eyes. Riverleaf had stationed him by the teleporter so that he could keep an eye out for any reinforcements.

"The humans have sent reinforcements!" the youth said between pants.

"They have?" Riverleaf exclaimed, some hope finally rekindling in her heart. "How many?"

Little Leaf scratched his chin in hesitation before he muttered.

"Three people came," he said with an almost inaudible voice. "But one is a child it seems?"

"So two warriors," Riverleaf sighed in disappointment, realizing it was just more opportunists.

She knew that she couldn't hope for too much. That large human organization had already indicated that they were overwhelmed with similar threats, and they had gotten similar responses from their Ishiate allies. But honestly, she knew that most simply did not wish to risk their lives for no reward.

"Yes, only two... But they are strong," he added with wide eyes.

Riverleaf was about to respond when her heart suddenly thumped and she looked over in the distance with alarm. Two men and a blue child approached, and Riverleaf immediately understood that these people were the trio that Little Leaf mentioned. Her second sight screamed in alarm at their approach, telling her that this party could level Everwood Refuge without much trouble.

While there were three of them her eyes couldn't help but turn toward the human in the middle. He had short hair the color of sand, and he wore an opulent golden robe that made her think of her brethren who gave up their connection to amass material wealth.

In his hand was a ruthless axe that made her almost flinch as she imagined an ocean of blood for some reason. She knew that it was an omen from her shamanic powers, but she couldn't guess it's meaning. The axe felt primal, like something their hunters would fashion out of the bones of a great beast. It was an odd choice of weapon for someone dressed in something so fine; the man was a contradiction of refinement and carnage.

She knew that her gifts could be noticed by some people since their world changed, but she couldn't help but activate her skill that the System had named [Minor Prophetic Vision]. She wanted to get a glimpse of whether these people were their saviors, but a soul-rending pain erupted in her mind, only allowing her a glimpse before her sight turned black.

The silver-haired man was shrouded in darkness, a black hand dragging him into an abyss of despair. The vision was extremely taxing, but it was nothing compared to the man in the golden robes. She was assaulted by tens of visions she couldn't make sense of, completely obscuring his future. She only managed to see a glimpse of his past instead.

The man stood with his axe accompanied by a monstrous beast in a sea of blood, a storm vengeful spirits clamoring in hatred and despair. Just how many had he killed to form such a following of the dead? But while he seemed to be an apostle of death, he was also the bringer of life. A golden halo rose behind him, and it formed an equal and opposing force to the hurricane of the fallen.

Refinement and carnage; life and death.

She had no time to make sense of the visions as it felt like she was about to die, and blood flowed out of her nose and ears. She had overtaxed her soul for that brief glimpse. Her body was unable to withstand

the prophetic weight of the man in front of him. Perhaps not even the Grand Shaman would be able to endure a peek into this man's future.

The party seemed to move leisurely, but they quickly closed the distance between the teleporter and the rampart she stood on, and as they came closer primal flight-responses were screaming in Riverleaf's mind. But she forced herself to stand still, gazing at their approach with her normal vision. Their steps echoed like the drums of war in her mind, and it felt like their forms towered to the out the sky.

The trio suddenly disappeared in a shroud of darkness, before they appeared right in front of her on top of the rampart. She made sure to not use shamanic powers that had been a natural part of her since childhood. Using her gifts in this close proximity would likely fry her brain, turning her into a simpleton. The two adults calmly overlooked the losing battle out in the field after glancing at her.

As they were closer she got a better look at the two. It was obvious that the man with the shadow hand was neither Human nor Ishiate, but rather something she had never encountered before. He had large horns in his forehead that that looked like frozen fire, and his skin had a reddish tinge.

She was curious about his heritage, but she didn't dare to ask. In truth, she didn't even dare to speak up. The duo had obviously masked their power, but she knew the truth about this small group from her shamanic vision. They could not be insulted or angered, since they were drenched in blood.

"It's these bastards?" the horned man said with surprise as he looked at the army. "Well, that's just fine."

The man with the in the golden robes turned toward Riverleaf and nodded in greeting. She didn't trust her voice at the moment, so she could only bow in response, holding her hands nervously in front of her.

"I am Zac. You should call back your warriors. We can take it from here," he said with a calm voice, his eyes not even showing a ripple after witnessing the huge army of golems that were steadily ripping through their line of defenses.

"But..." she hesitantly said, but she had no chance to continue as they disappeared just like they appeared.

The next moment she sensed a monstrous power from the battlefield and she looked over with worry, afraid that their enemies had launched a renewed assault.

Her eyes were immediately drawn toward an enormous hand hovering in the air. The hand had appeared out of nowhere, and it radiated an earthshattering might. It clearly was made of wood and made her think of the Treefather from the legends. Had the old gods returned to save them from their plight? The hand flew toward the army with terrifying speed, and the golems scrambled to erect defenses.

But it was to naught as the hand slammed into the ground with enough force to almost throw her off the rampart. The earth shook and large cracks in the ground quickly spread from the impact. Over a hundred of the golems that had caused them so many troubles were utterly destroyed in an instant, and twice as many were lying on the ground with serious wounds.

The next moment the whole battlefield was shrouded in darkness. It was as though the darkness was alive, and it twisted and changed shapes. Spears grew out from nowhere, the golems were getting

impaled by the dozens. In just a second it looked like a forest with trees wrought from shadows had grown in front of their city, and each tree held a dead or dying invader.

Two familiar silhouettes made themselves known in the middle of the battle-field, and in the next moment they rushed forward with wild abandon. Riverleaf wanted to shout out a warning, but her voice got stuck in her throat when they unleashed a mindboggling carnage upon the golems.

“Young miss, there's no need to worry. Those two will neutralize the calamity that has befallen your fair city. Better yet, I will turn calamity into opportunity,” a refined voice from next to her spoke up, making Riverleaf look over with surprise.

It was the blue child who had spoken to her. She had completely forgotten about him due to the shocking presence of the other two, but he had clearly stayed behind as those two had unleashed their attacks on the invaders. She prepared to placate the child, but at a second glance she realized it was no child who had spoken with her. It was rather a man from yet another unknown race.

“Pleased to make your acquaintance,” the small blue being said with a bow. “I am Calrin Thayer, and I would like to provide you with the opportunity of a lifetime.”