

The Fall 293

Chapter 293: Different Choices

"Our founder, the first Baron Marshall, called his small manor the Old Homestead. Through the centuries our family grew, and many expansions and remodels took place, but the name always stuck with us. The manor gained its current form in the late 18th century, though we have added quite a bit real estate since the integration. Our family was spread all over the globe before the world changed, but we have worked hard to bring as many as possible home," Roland explained.

When Emily heard his explanation she immediately perked up.

"Have you mapped out the world by now? Do you know where all the cultivators from Allentown appeared?" she hurriedly asked before Zac could rein her in.

It wasn't that he didn't want Emily to find her two siblings, but rather that he didn't want to give the Marshall Clan too much information. His relations with Thea didn't necessarily extend to the rest of the family, and he didn't want Emily's brother and sister to end up as potential pawns in some political game.

"We looked around the area of the town, but that group seems to have been teleported to somewhere else on earth," Zac added calmly to explain what she meant.

"I can't say that we have a full grasp of our new world so far, but we have successfully mapped out almost our supercontinent. However, according to our astronomers our planet is enormous, with a diameter of at least twenty times that of our old World," Roland explained. "And according to our calculations, Pangea takes up only around 20% of the total surface."

Zac was pretty shocked by the sheer size of their new planet. He knew that Pangea was simply massive. The Undead Incursion was as large as the former United States, but it was only a small section of the massive continent. To think that such a huge chunk of land was only twenty percent of the total.

But it also made Zac more certain that the other landmass was another continent rather than a large island. Zac had even thought it possible that they simply had reached Pangea from both ends, but that one of the coasts was uninhabited.

"We have reason to believe that our continent isn't the only one, though we still haven't heard any news about another. Perhaps it's simply a massive ocean," Roland said, almost confirming Zac's thoughts. "But mapping the great beyond has proven difficult. Our drones get taken down by huge birds and our ship destroyed by frenzied sealife. In general, the Cosmic Energy causes great disturbance to transmitted signals."

After asking a few questions to make sure he understood which city Emily was referring to he tapped it into some app. But he didn't speak for a few seconds and Zac started to frown when he noticed his face. He quickly placed a hand on Emily's arm for support.

"What is it?" Zac asked.

"Unfortunately... It seems they belong to one of the lost groups..." he hesitantly said before he looked up at Emily. "Young lady, do not give up hope though. We still do not know the fate of the lost groups, and they may be alive and well."

"Lost groups?" Zac said after seeing Emily being stunned silent. "What do you mean?"

"By now we have mapped out roughly 98 percent of all tutorial groups in the civilized world. That does not include regions with weak censuses though where we can't make accurate assumptions. Of the thousands of groups we and the New World Government has mapped, 29% are missing," Roland said as he showed a graph on the tablet.

"We believe a few percents are missing due to the Zhix. We know for a fact that many groups with large Zhix presences were completely annihilated. Some made it with just a handful of survivors who managed to hide from the Zhix rampage during the quests," Roland explained.

"But for the most part we believe the missing groups be to related to the fourth race," Roland said and threw an odd look at Alea. "So we believe that a quarter of the tutorial groups have been moved to wherever the inhabitants of the fourth world reside, though their fates are unknown."

Zac sighed and nodded in confirmation. He understood that look very well. The first time he introduced the Demons he said they were the fourth race to avoid trouble. But with the hunt, most of the larger organizations should have realized that the fourth race was the molemen living in the underworld.

Zac hadn't met any humans from the underworld in the hunt, but between the molemen and other hunters there should have been hundreds of them appearing, and the information should have quickly spread.

Perhaps the Marshall clan and the government were already trying to get in contact with the underworld to liberate the people or claim the riches. Still, since they were almost at the mansion he didn't bring up the subject and instead turned to Emily.

"Don't worry, we will keep looking. Nothing is certain yet," Zac said, and Emily somberly nodded her head.

Not long after they passed the manned gates as the two cars stopped right outside the doors. It was getting late, but floodlights kept the whole square in front of the manor completely lit, and multiple guards were making rounds.

Zac felt a bit out of place in this sort of luxurious environment, but being a top powerhouse instilled him with an air of confidence as they followed Roland inside. The others had much more varied expressions as they ranged from slightly bored to gaping and loudly exclaiming at the opulence inside.

"Man, this place is creepy," Emily muttered. "This place is haunted for sure."

Zac coughed in embarrassment, but he inwardly had to agree. He had already met ghosts since the integration so he knew they were real. And if some existed on Earth, this old manor was a prime contender for being ghost central. The large hallway was stacked with antique relics, with everything from art to ancient weaponry and armors.

"Young lady, you might in fact be on to something," Roland said as he looked over with a smile. "Stories of hauntings in this manor have circulated for at least two hundred years. The middle ages were quite bloody, and some say resentment might have lingered. We have even brought in experts to make sure that we don't have any supernatural beings hiding in the attic now that the world is full of magic."

Emily paled a bit as she glanced around as she walked closer to Zac. It didn't look like she had expected her random remark to have such credence.

"You've made it," a wizened voice suddenly echoed out through the doorway at the end of the hall, and when they entered they found Henry Marshall standing in front of a table laden with documents. "We were starting to worry some complications had arisen. But when we noticed you had gained another level we figured that you had found some opportunity."

"The company you keep is still quite diverse," the Marshall patriarch noted as he looked up from the stack of papers on the table.

"I haven't changed my mind on that front since we last spoke," Zac said as he accepted a glass of champagne from a waiter that soundlessly arrived with refreshments.

"There are a lot of new faces," Henry said as he looked over the party until it stopped at Nonet. "Strength to your hive. I am Henry Marshall, leader of the Marshall clan."

"I am Nonet, Anointed of Hive Kundeivi. Strength to your hive," Nonet said with some surprise.

"I assume you joined Lord Atwood to reconvene with your brethren at the nearby hive?" Henry asked, drawing a simple nod from the Anointed. "I will have my men escort you in a car at your convenience. If you could relay the message that we simply wish for peaceful co-existence I would be in your debt. Our own tries at diplomacy have proven unfruitful."

"I will relay the message to the council," Nonet said without promising anything further.

Nonet was anxious to visit the hive, so Henry arranged for an escort for Nonet and Ibtep, and they immediately left the manor.

"Thea is not coming today?" Zac suddenly asked as he looked around.

There were only Henry and a handful of family members that seemed to act as advisors and aides in the large room. Thea was nowhere in sight, and neither was Billy for that matter.

"When she heard that you got delayed she decided to head into the wilderness to fight. The beasts are progressing quite rapidly and unless we regularly cull them we would risk a beast tide. But mostly it was her competitive spirit that wouldn't let her sit still while you improved," Henry explained with a smile. "Your large friend went with her."

Zac nodded in understanding as he sat down at a table that could seat over twenty people. For a moment he thought they tried to hide Thea to avoid returning the items he lent her, but he felt that Thea wouldn't go along with such a thing. A luxurious dinner was soon served, and the topics were kept light. The family members from the Marshall clans were great conversationalists, and it soon felt like a gathering of old friends.

Clearly, their goal was to dig out all kinds of information through the occasional and seemingly innocuous question, but everyone knew to keep quiet about sensitive matters. Besides, only Kenzie and Ogras knew of the truly sensitive intelligence on Port Atwood. Even Emily who lived on his compound had no idea about the true identity of the Creators.

After the dinner was over Zac noted that Henry gave the sign to the servants, and they all left the room in quick order. Left were only Henry, four aides, and Zac's retinue.

"I hope that we will be able to forge a strong alliance between our forces during your visit, and take the first step toward purging our planet from invaders," Henry began as his eyes swept toward Adran and Alea. "However, before that there is something that I would need clarified. I think you know what I am talking about."

"The demons?" Zac said with a smile.

As he expected the issue cropped up almost immediately.

"The Demons," Henry confirmed with a somber face.

"It is as you expect, they were once part of the Incursion close to Port Atwood," Zac said. "As you might have heard from Thea, the integration left me alone on an island along with a Demonkin Incursion.

"I am not sure how clear your people are about the details, but after the conditions for closing an Incursions are met, the invading force is given a grace period to escape through their Nexus Hub," Zac continued. "There was a group that chose to break ties with their old force, and instead join me in founding Port Atwood."

"We are aware of the mechanics," Henry nodded. "However you must understand the risk you are putting yourself and Earth in. In one hundred years they will be able to contact their former clan, leading them back here at full force."

The two demons at the table threw Henry cold glances, but he completely ignored them.

"So what would you do if you were in my situation?" Zac asked.

"We were in your situation a short time ago when we finally managed to close the Incursion that plagued the area. My granddaughter managed to assassinate a few of the leaders, allowing us to win the war. Most fled through the crystal when defeat was inevitable, but a few stayed on," Henry explained, a ruthless glint shimmering in his eyes. "We killed them to the last man."

Zac felt a shiver when he looked into Henry Marshall's eyes. The old man was nowhere strong enough to be a threat to him, but Zac knew that he himself lacked such ruthlessness. Henry was ready to go to any length to protect his family and their interests, and Zac had a feeling that was what he was conveying by telling Zac about their handling of the incursion.

"Well, our situations were different. I needed people and information, and the demons provided both. Besides, they would be the first to get killed by their clan if they called them over," Zac said. "As for how I handle the other Incursions, that will depend on their actions."

Besides, Zac already knew that the few D-Grade powerhouses Clan Azh'Rezak possessed were right at the start of the grade. They had barely managed to pass the hurdle of forming their core, but they wouldn't go any further on the path of cultivation.

Only the clan leader and the supreme elder were slightly better. There was no way that they would be able to mount an assault on Earth unless their planets for some reason became neighbors through some cosmic joke.

The atmosphere in the room started to become quite heavy, and the advisors threw Henry worried looks. They were no doubt unhappy about an escalating conflict, especially when Thea was out hunting. But suddenly Henry reclined in his chair with a shrug.

"The strong make the rules. Such is our reality now, and the rest will have to accept it and adapt. This brings us to another issue, have you been able to connect with the underworld?" the old man said.

Zac was slightly thrown off by the change in subject, but the two were connected in a sense. Since Henry had stepped back on the issue of the Demons, then so would he.

"No. Either their teleporters are not public or there is something else causing interference," Zac said with a shake of his head.

He still didn't feel it was time to disclose his theory of the second continent.

"You should know that most forces are currently desperately digging downward to connect with the underworld. The fact that there are massive riches has spread far and wide because of a few bigmouthed hunters," Henry said with a sigh. "It's a modern-day gold rush, and many are even ignoring the threats of the Incursions."