

The Fall 301

Chapter 301: The Ez'Mahal

The next day a somber procession marched through Port Atwood. Thousands of men and women gripping weapons proceeded in an orderly fashion, everyone donning a backpack. They were all heading toward the undead incursion, to stem the spread of death. Some couldn't help fear from creeping onto their faces, whereas many glowed with anticipation. The civilians of Port Atwood silently looked on at the procession, knowing that the final battle for Earth was about to begin.

Meanwhile, a far less conspicuous group silently gathered within the inner walls, less than fifty warriors. But each one emitted power far beyond that of the general soldiers of the town. It was the strike squad that stood in front of Zac, and he surveyed them with Ogras by his side. He knew that he was supposed to say something at a juncture like this, but he didn't know what.

"Let's go. This is just the first battle of many, so remember to stay alive," Zac simply said as he turned toward the private teleporter.

It activated with a flash and soon the small group of people had entered. The next moment Zac and his people found themselves in a run-down warehouse. The shelves were empty, and dust was gathering in the corners. It was clear that this teleporter was not commonly used, but two armed men hurried over as soon as they arrived.

"Lord Atwood?" one of them asked, receiving a nod from Zac.

The man quickly pulled out a stack of papers from a bag, handing it over. It was a missive providing the latest intelligence of the Incursion.

"We are currently one hundred kilometers away from the edge of the sphere of influence of the Ez'Mahal Confederation. They have been known to sometimes roam even this far out in search of new slaves, so be careful. There have been no special movements the past few days," the man quickly updated them. "Will you be needing anything from us?"

"Thank you," Zac said. "It's fine like this. We will be back in three days at the most."

The next moment the squad streamed outside like specters of death, and immediately set a high pace toward the Incursion. The climate of the area was temperate, with leafy trees that had already shed their leaves. Winter was coming to large parts of Pangea, and not all the areas were spared from the cold like Port Atwood.

They had no special plan, only to push straight toward the heart of the incursion, killing any resistance that might crop up. It wasn't that Zac took lightly of the situation, but rather that there simply was too little information to go by. The Marshall clan had set up an extensive network around the incursions, but they were unable to gather any detailed intelligence from the core.

This was another reason that Zac chose this one. From all accounts this incursion seemed less organized than the usual, making it a good target for a first run. They would be able to improve their teamwork and planning as they kept going.

It didn't take long for them to enter the area that the human invaders had claimed for themselves, but as the hours passed Zac started to frown.

"Where are all the people? The report said that these people didn't kill everyone?" Zac asked Ogras who was running by his side.

They hadn't entered any of the towns they passed, but they had sent a scout inside for intelligence. However, every single town they had passed was completely deserted and seemed to have been so for months.

"They have likely moved the population to large slave colonies, to save on resources. The beast problem will only get worse before it gets better, and it would waste too much manpower to guard all these small towns," Ogras ventured with a shrug.

The demons were not too worried about the plight of the enslaved humans since they came from a society where slavery was quite common as well. Zac knew he couldn't change anyone's opinions on the matter, so he only kept running.

However, even the expressions of the demons started to change as they approached the core of the area controlled by the Ez'Mahal. They were proceeding along the main path toward the main settlement, and the path suddenly had an extremely disturbing change. The roadside was littered with corpses, an endless number of them. Some were impaled on large poles while others had been hung from trees along the road.

One thing that seemed to unite all of the poor people was that they had been alive when they were hung, judging by their expressions and poses. All of them had undergone inhumane torture before being left to die.

"Animals," Joanna growled as she placed a hand on a pale-faced Emily, while the others seethed as well.

Even the usually bloodthirsty demons looked at the morbid scene with disgust and Billy had lost his usual joviality as he looked around with red eyes.

"Who did this?" the giant said with building fury.

"The guys we are about to attack," Zac said with a grim face. "The Ez'Mahal Confederation."

Billy silently repeated the name as he kept looking at the trees, but suddenly a sound echoed from the distance as they saw a car approaching along the lonely road. It was a Jeep that had undergone some alterations to increase its sturdiness, and a large familiar insignia could be seen on the hood. It was the very same one in the intelligence report, meaning the car belonged to the Incursion.

"It's them," Zac said, preparing to capture one of them as the car stopped fifty meters away from them.

But Billy was one step faster as he pushed away from the ground with a roar, closing the distance in one herculean leap. His enormous club was already in his hand, rumbling like thunder as it fell straight toward the Car. A few people hurriedly tried to create some distance from the car, but most barely had time to open the door before the club smashed into the roof with a thunderous explosion.

The tremendous attack flattened the car and most of its occupants in an instant. Only two men managed to escape in time, but Ogras was already on the move. One of them was immediately impaled

by dozens of spears and thrown onto a branch, joining the other victims along the road. The other man was soon in Ogras' grip and forcefully dragged back toward Zac and the others.

"Who are you? Attacking the Ez'Mahal will result in your forces being annihilated," the man said with some remaining bluster. "Your men will become war slaves and your women whores!"

Zac didn't bother responding to the man and simply motioned for Ogras to extract information.

"Look away," Ogras said to Emily, but she staunchly shook her head as she glared at the man in front of them.

Ogras simply shrugged, and the next moment a shadow blade cut one of the man's legs clean off, making the man scream his lungs out. One of the demons in the group stepped forward, conjuring a fireball, and pressed it against the wound to stem the bleeding.

"Now, answer our questions and you will get a quick death. Otherwise, we will keep chopping and cauterizing until you are more cooperative," Ogras said with an unhurried voice.

The man frenziedly nodded that he would comply, his bluster completely gone in an instant. It turned out that the people hanging from the sides were slaves that had caused displeasure to the invaders. That could mean anything from not working hard enough or simply making eye contact, there was truly no rhyme or reason to it.

Normally the Ez'Mahal Confederation wasn't this brutal. Slaves were a commodity after all, and this was a waste of money. But the leader of the invasion was someone called Thanso, a scion of some large aristocratic family in the confederation.

He was extremely cruel and didn't care about the well-being of the natives in the slightest since he didn't care about the resources that the slaves could harvest. Instead, he turned the area into a twisted hellscape where his closest circle could do any depraved thing they wished while he mainly focused on the Dao.

However, most people were still alive thanks to an early discovery by the Ez'Mahal. A very large area with Spiritual Soil had been found close to the Nexus Hub, turning the area extremely suitable for the cultivation of certain in-demand herbs. The slaves were mainly used as a workforce to clear farmland and work the farms. But they were also used to stave off the beast hordes who were attracted by the large fields of Spirit Herbs.

Ogras kept asking about specifics in the defenses of the Incursion, and anything other information that was lacking in the intelligence report. There were no particularly strong forces in the area, meaning that the Incursion hadn't really been tested so far. That was likely due to a stroke of brilliance by the generals of the incursions though.

A large number of strike squads containing humans from the Ez'Mahal Empire infiltrated all the promising forces in the area right before the tutorial ended, and assassinated a lot of cultivators the moment they returned. That caused the collapse of most of the towns in the vicinity, making for easy pickings to restock on slaves.

The core of the incursion was a newly erected town called Grand Escape. It was an allusion to the fact that the Ez'Mahal nobles did not consider the invasion a life and death struggle, but rather a retreat

where they could play around and gain some benefits before going home. However, that would all change soon.

There was a defensive array that seemed decently strong, and apart from that, there was an identification array similar to the one in Westfort. A tag was needed to pass through the gates without causing an alarm. Everyone from the Ez'Mahal Empire possessed one, and it seemed that the main function of the array was to stop slaves from escaping rather than protect from infiltrators.

Ogras took the tag from the captive, and after throwing a glance at Zac slit the man's throat, making him bleed out in seconds.

"We can't use this," Ogras said as he observed the tag. "It seems to have been connected to his life force. If we walked through the gates wearing this we would no doubt be caught."

"So we can only brute force it?" Zac asked, not sparing the dead man another glance.

"No, I doubt that they went so far as to have a system that checks every single person's individual aura," Ogras mused. "I think that we can use these tokens if we keep the original owners alive. If that fails as well, then we can only go straight in."

"Okay, we'll find another squad," Zac said. "Billy, don't smash the next one."

The group set out again, and soon they were only 30 minutes away from the Grand Escape. Traffic was a lot higher here, with both cars and cultivators riding some horse-like beats passing the streets every other minute. The group had already gone into the woods to avoid being spotted, and they captured five groups passing by in quick succession.

They were stripped of their clothes and weapons before Ogras and a few demons took them away. Zac threw a confused glance at him when he returned with a dense aura of blood around him.

"They will live for an hour, perhaps two. Though they would probably wish it would be over much quicker though," the demon said with a nefarious smile, and Zac didn't care enough to ask anything further.

Soon they were all dressed in gear from the captured squads, though they were forced to make some improvised modifications for Billy and the Demons. Hopefully, no one would look too carefully at the people inside the stolen vehicles.

"If we get through the gates that's for the best," Zac said as he looked at the squad. "If not we'll head straight for the castle. Kill everyone in the way, but conserve energy. Emily, give me the Endurance boost please."

It wasn't that he was worried about getting hurt, but the aura would also boost Emily. Letting her gain a part of his own monstrous Endurance would help her stay safe in the upcoming battle. Emily nodded and the next moment a green axe appeared in her hand, and she threw it into Zac. He felt a surge of power, and a quick check of his status screen showed that it worked just like the fire axe, except this one gave Endurance and Vitality.

"Wow," Emily gasped as she looked with wide eyes at Zac, her own aura having suddenly increased by a large margin. "You're like a tank."

Zac shrugged with a smile, knowing she was surprised by the size of the boost she got. She had likely believed that Strength was his highest attribute after seeing how much she got from the flame axe.

"Girl, how much Endurance does he have?" Ogras said while poking Emily from the side.

"Not telling," Emily grinned.

"Okay, that's enough," Zac said with a helpless shake of his head. "They're going to notice a bunch of people has gone missing soon enough, let's head out."