

The Fall 306

Chapter 306: The Tal-Eladar

It took Zac three days to bring a semblance of order to Verdant Fields, which was the new name given to Grand Escape. The old name simply had too many bad memories associated with it. He initially wanted to head straight to the next Incursion the same day, but he soon realized he had to give up on that plan.

First of all the warriors needed rest. They weren't like Zac with his monstrous attributes. They had truly risked their lives in the battle, and most of the demons had various degrees of wounds, notwithstanding the high-quality gear that Zac lent them.

It was easy to forget that they had charged into an army of hundreds of men with less than twenty people, even though they were just a little bit stronger than the defenders. It was almost a miracle that no one died. Of course, chalking it up to just luck was oversimplifying it. They had arrived with monstrous momentum, and between Zac, Ogras, and Billy the enemies' lines completely collapsed before they could mount a resistance.

Apart from rest and post-battle meditation to consolidate the Dao, there was also the need to consolidate the area. Verdant Fields was in the center of a region with extreme potential value, and Gredas, the old demonkin farmer, had immediately rushed over when he heard about the huge fields of Spiritual Soil.

They had quickly decided to transplant a large amount of the soil to Port Atwood and its neighboring farming islands, but this place would likely become the agricultural headquarters of his empire in the future. The herbs that were currently growing would be able to be used for medicinal baths, something that would be in extremely high demand on earth the coming decades as people tried to evolve their race.

But restoring order to the area was easier said than done. There was not only the issue of clothing, feeding, and treating thousands upon thousands of liberated slaves, but they also needed to set up a working governing body. All while hunting the Ez'Mezal warriors who still hid in the population.

Zac had made fleeing Earth impossible in his fit of rage, but that had also left them with the headache of finding the invaders. This wasn't like the golem Incursion where it was extremely easy to figure out who the enemies were, since the foreign invaders from the Ez'Mahal Empire were able to blend in with a change of clothes.

They were forced to bring over the array that Ogras had used to find the shapeshifters, but by the time they got the array running most had already left the area.

The one thing that made their lives a bit easier was how quickly the non-combat classes had given up, and they hadn't caused any problem so far. Their people came from an empire completely based on slave labor, so a force being defeated and its people turned into slaves happened every day. It was lucky as well that they adapted to the situation so quickly, since there were tens of thousands of them.

Zac was shocked at the count, as the number of people far eclipsed what the demons brought to his island. Usually, the incursions weren't too populous since it cost Nexus Coins to send everyone over, but non-combat classes were far cheaper compared to powerhouses.

But the biggest reason there were so many of them was that the invaders gained its first round of reinforcements not long ago. It was inevitable that the incursions would be able to bolster their ranks within the first year, but Zac was still a bit disappointed that it had already happened. It didn't really affect them in this battle, but he had a feeling that they simply got lucky this time.

The Ez'Mahal had no strong enemies in the area, and Earth's performance hadn't impressed anyone so far. Zac, Billy, and Thea were the only ones who had defeated their neighboring Incursions, and Zac's feat wasn't even publicly known. They likely hadn't felt there was any need to bolster their troops in the short run, and instead sent over personnel to manage the slaves and help extract everything of value in the area.

Currently, the vast number of non-combat people were separated from the former slaves, and their expertise and actions were being tallied by his army. They needed proper insight into what they were dealing with here.

As things started to get under control with the help of the personnel from Port Atwood, Zac and the others started to turn their eyes toward the next target. He and the others of the strike force were currently sitting in a conference room in Thanso's former mansion, planning their next step.

"Things are mostly settled here," Ogras said from the other side of the table. "Which one have you decided on next?"

Zac looked around the room and saw a wide range of emotions. The demons looked eager as ever, perhaps since two of them had managed to improve a Dao Seed after the battle. Apparently, one's connection to the Dao also improved when one evolved, though Zac didn't know if that also applied to himself with his weird constitution.

The Valkyries sat with stone-cold eyes full of determination. The pitiful lives of the slaves in the area had rekindled the buried memories of their own fates in Greenworth, and they wanted to keep fighting to free others who had been enslaved. For them the battles weren't about resources or improvement, but about liberation.

Emily had returned to her happy-go-lucky self. She had been shaken by the evil perpetrated in Verdant Green before they reclaimed it, but she had channeled that shock and rage into her desire to become stronger. And she was currently riding the powerleveling train that was Zac.

His rampage had actually awarded her almost two levels. Curiously enough she gained almost all of it from the weaker soldiers, whereas the death of the incursion leader awarded her next to nothing. It was at that point Ogras explained that she got a penalty due to the level difference, just like Zac gained no energy for killing weaker beasts by now.

It was a way to avoid too blatant exploitation. But the result was still above expectation since she gained quite a bit of Cosmic Energy without lifting her fingers. It wasn't even impossible that she'd be able to break into the ladder if she followed Zac for a month or two.

"The one with the elves," Zac said, taking out one of the intelligence missives. "It's another force that has actively hunted outside their region for slaves. But this one isn't run by trash. They have some sort of detection arrays, and their defensive array is perpetually running. We will not be able to ambush them."

Ogras grabbed hold of the stack of information with a frown.

"The Tal-Eladar," he said, causing some blood lust to leak from the demonic soldiers. "I do not recognize their crest, though."

The Tal-Eladar wasn't truly elves, but Marshall clan informally called them that due to their appearance. They had long pointed ears that slightly drooped at their tip and lithe frames, which brought to mind elves from fantasy stories. However, there were some differences between elves and the humanoids in the incursion.

First of all their eyes looked a bit creepy according to the report, and a comment likened them to goat's eyes, with oblong horizontal pupils and no sclera. Their teeth were also sharp, meaning they didn't live on morning dew and fruits like elves in the stories did.

Their actions of constant expansion and raids weren't very reminiscent of the harmonious bearing of the woodland people either. While the Ez'Mahal had been somewhat content with tending to their massive plantations the Tal-Eladar had increased the size of their Incursion three-fold since the initial push. It was nowhere near the actions of the Undead Empire, but it was still a large-scale conquest.

That was one of the main reasons why Zac chose this incursion. The Ez'Mahal was targeted for the combination of the horrible treatment of natives with their weak force. The Tal-Eladar were instead targeted for their constant expansion. Every time they conquered a new town more people would be enslaved or killed, and nipping it in the bud as quickly as possible was important to stop their expansion.

But what Zac didn't expect was the reaction of the demons in the conference room.

"What's going on?" Zac asked with some confusion.

"The Tal-Eladar and the demonkin are in an almost perpetual war in our sector," Ogras explained. "You remember how Clan Azh'Rezak makes their money as mercenaries? Our progenitor was a mercenary who made his name in a war against these people. In fact, most of our elders and veterans have fought in wars against the Tal-Eladar."

"So it's a racial thing," Zac said. "Well, we will still go by the standard plan. We will see how they have treated people. If it's like here, then they will get the same treatment. If they have acted within limits then we will let them leave, no matter your bad blood."

The demons looked a bit unwilling, but soon they acquiesced.

"Good. I don't want to have to lug around the Origin Array everywhere to hunt dissidents," Zac said as he turned to Billy who was sitting by one of the ends of the table with a vacant stare.

"Billy, will you be able to fight?" Zac probed.

"Ah?" Billy said, waking with a start. "Billy can fight."

"Good. We are going to another bad place, just like this place was," Zac said. "We need you to thwack their shield. Like you did in the hunt to save Thea."

Billy seriously nodded.

"Mama always said the strong need to help others. Billy will help save the people."

"Good," Zac said. "Is there anything else that needs to be done here?"

"Everything is dealt with, except our lack of experts is making itself shown," Ogras said with a sigh. "We don't have anyone strong enough to hold down the fort."

"I don't want anyone to defend this place to their deaths," Zac said. "If someone wants to take this piece of land, let them. I will make them give it back, and then some, after we're done with the Incursions. But I don't want to leave these people to their fates if I can help them."

"We do not need too large defending forces for now," Ogras agreed. "I doubt anyone on this baby planet can block teleporters or perform other advanced siege tactics. But we simply do not possess the man-power if we wish to run a dozen spheres of influence from all the Incursions we will conquer."

"I think we can make use of the people here," Joanna interjected.

A few of the demons threw her a dismissive glance. It wasn't a dig at the Valkyrie, but rather about what they thought of the liberated humans. And it was true, there was not a single competent warrior as far as the eye could see. The Ez'Mahal had made sure of that. But Joanna ignored the looks and pressed on.

"I don't mean for defenses, but running the places. We only need a small number of people to act as the police, while we set up a local government. It wasn't like we needed the army in every city in the old days, right? That butler who has helped us can be the mayor or something," she explained.

"I agree," Zac slowly nodded. "Port Atwood has grown by incorporating new people from the beginning. There's no reason not to continue doing the same here. But that leaves the issue of the tens of thousands of non-combatant captives."

"Why not just keep them as slaves?" Ogras shrugged. "They're already mentally prepared for it."

Joanna and the other Valkyries in the room were visibly upset at the prospect of Port Atwood turning into a force utilizing slavery, and Zac frowned as well. But he honestly didn't have any better ideas. He couldn't simply kill them all, and sending them back was impossible since the Nexus Hubs were inactive.

At first, he considered sending them to isolated islands in his Archipelago where they could work for Port Atwood without the risk of them fleeing, but he knew that was just slavery with extra steps.

"I know many empires in the multiverse don't condone slavery, what do they do in cases like these?" Zac asked.

"Well, simply throwing them off the claimed territory is pretty common. What happens then is none of their concern. Most simply become fugitives settling in other areas on the planet. But the most common thing is doing nothing. It doesn't matter who sits at the top for the common people, life is mostly the same for them in either case," Ogras said.

"Our situation is a bit more complicated than that though, no?" Zac sighed. "If I simply released everyone then the people of Earth would be furious, and I would be marked as a traitor in no time. And I refuse to release the soldiers or anyone who has stepped over the line in the treatment of the people of Earth."

"What about this?" Ogras said after some thought. "They all are from this Ez'Mahal Empire, right? That means that they should be able to use the Nexus Hub to return there when the hubs open. Just have them work for passage until then. They will also be assigned a debt according to their actions in the invasions. This debt will partly go to us and partly to the victims as compensation."

Zac slowly considered the proposition as he threw a glance at the Valkyries. They seemed to be mostly fine with Ogras' suggestion, and Zac knew he wouldn't be able to think of something better in the short run. But suddenly something in Ogras' explanation hinted at another possibility.

"Wait, they will be able to return there? Doesn't that mean that you all will be able to go back when the hubs activate? More importantly, will you be able to come back here afterward?"