

## The Fall 310

### Chapter 310: Growth

Zac mutely looked down at the unmoving form of Verana before going over the prompts he just received. As expected he got confirmation that the area had been put under his control, and he once again got the opportunity to appoint a mayor.

The two beasts shrunk back to their non-combat form the moment that Verana fell over, and they slipped out of Zac's restraints due to their diminutive size. Both of them scuttled over to their master and cried pitifully when she didn't move, trying to look threatening to keep Zac away. Zac only shook his head in bemusement as he ended his skill and exhorted Verun to come back.

The Tel-Eladar army didn't move a muscle, even though quite a few of them looked extremely displeased. Then again it was too late for them to do anything by now, with Zac standing within arm's reach of their leader. He could easily use her as a hostage in case they mounted an attack.

As he waited for Verana to resurrect Zac chose to look inward. He wanted to look at the splinter right after the battle to see if anything had changed. He sensed that it slightly woke up during the battle, though he felt he was able to block its most obvious manipulation of his emotional state.

But conversely, he had roared in anger and thrown an enormous beast at his enemy like an enraged King Kong. It felt a bit out of character for him, and he was afraid that the corruption was slowly changing his personality without him noticing.

He could at least breathe out in relief when he saw that the miasmic barrier hadn't changed or weakened in the slightest from the battle. But he still felt an even greater urge to quickly evolve to E-Grade.

Evolving wouldn't have a direct boost to his attributes, as they came with gaining levels. But it did seem to strengthen one's mental power considerably since people had a much easier time to advance their Daos according to the demon warriors. Perhaps that would also help with his own problems. Anzonil's disciple had been able to stay sane for over a decade without the help of any miasmic fractals.

The Tal-Eladar leader woke up a bit later, the effects of [Coward's Escape] having passed. She breathed out in relief when she saw her two companions were safe apart from their battle wounds.

"Thank you for not killing me while I was dead," she said with a slightly raspy voice.

"Why did you go as far as to eat that pill?" Zac asked with some curiosity as he calmly watched her get back to his feet.

Since she had swallowed the pill the battle was truly over. She had already failed the invasion, and their path home would close in a few hours. There was no way for them to turn things around as things stood, so Zac wasn't too worried about Verana scheming something.

"I was afraid you wouldn't trust my surrender and kill these two cuties out of precaution," she said as she fed her two pets healing pills. "A deal's a deal. The Tal-Eladar will leave this planet immediately."

Zac internally breathed out in relief when he saw that she wouldn't make any trouble. But he also knew that there likely wasn't much she could do at the moment. When his eyes went to the two small critters

who happily cried in her chest he noted that their auras were pretty weak and erratic, far worse than their wounds could explain.

Zac felt that it was likely that her class could instill her beasts with increased power for a short duration, but that it left both parties weakened afterward. Sort of like his own skill, [Hatchetman's Rage]. They had likely fought above their usual power from the start, just to have a shot at defeating him.

"I have another proposition," Zac suddenly said as he looked at Verana.

She hesitantly looked at Zac, with her eyes occasionally darting over to Ogras who was sauntering over.

"Are you going back on your word?" Verana asked somberly.

"No, your people are free to leave. But there is no rush. You have eight hours, right?" Zac said, receiving a nod in confirmation.

"We will not be a party to some demonkin scheme," she immediately declared when Ogras appeared in earshot.

"Since when has the Tal-Eladar been worthy of our scheming? You always run in head-first like your contracted animals," Ogras snorted as he walked up next to Zac, giving him a small thumbs-up as his evaluation of the battle. "What are you thinking?"

"You said that your force put a lot of their resources into this invasion. Why not stay behind for a hundred years?" Zac said. "This area will become part of my kingdom, but the Tir'Emarel can maintain a stake in its resources."

This wasn't completely an impulse-decision. He had already noted how understaffed they were after conquering the last incursion, and he knew just how huge an impact the demons had on Port Atwood. Just a tenth of their people stayed behind, but they had enabled Zac to create a faction that had almost everything a proper multiverse force needed.

Keeping some of the invaders in his employ would make his life a lot easier. They both possessed strong fighters and experienced non-combat classes that could easily manage this small area for him. It would allow him to keep the benefits

Such a strategy wouldn't work with most forces, but Ogras' mention of how similar this force was to his own planted the idea in his mind. Most forces invading earth wouldn't even consider allying themselves to Zac, but the Tir'Emarel family was pretty weak and recently established.

Even if they set up a connection between the two forces Zac felt it unlikely they would be able to be a threat to earth in a hundred years. The cost of the invasion would likely be greater than the gains, making it more profitable to turn it into a business venture instead.

Getting a permanent off-world trading channel would be a huge opportunity for them, and could even turn into one of their main revenue streams. The Mercantile system was great, but sometimes it was far more cost-efficient to take the trade outside it.

The Mercantile System wasn't without its demerits. The most glaring one was the prices the System charged for teleporting produce. Things that weren't too valuable couldn't be traded through the system since it added costs based on both value and volume.

That was why they couldn't simply sell off all their surplus gear made from the ant shells and wolf pelts through the Mercantile system. The System would eat up all of their profits, keeping them for itself. In such cases manually transporting the goods was a much better option if the items couldn't be sold locally. Teleporting a Cosmos Sack was quite a bit cheaper than a person, allowing for interplanetary trade as long as the volumes were large enough.

"That would leave us stranded here for a hundred years though, without being able to contact home. And at your mercy," Verana skeptically said.

"A hundred years is just the blink of the eye in the multiverse," Zac insisted. "You'll be back before you know it."

Verana's brows contracted in thought, and it looked like she was seriously considering the offer for the first time.

"That still leaves the issue of what would happen to us if the Undead Empire succeed in their assault. They never care about other forces. Everyone will be forced to leave in a hurry or become undead themselves," the beastmaster said.

"Well, it is a gamble on this planet's power I guess," Zac said. "You would have to leave at least as many fighters as non-combat classes, and they would be expected to join me in our defense against the Undead, and any other enemies of Earth."

"This... I cannot make a decision of my own on this matter. Will you give me an hour?" she said after hesitating a bit.

"Sure," Zac said with a nod, letting Verana return to her forces.

"Allying with the Tal-Eladar," Ogras muttered as he watched the back of Verana. "Are you trying to make sure my people will never be able to go back home?"

"Hadn't you already cut ties with them in any case?" Zac smiled.

"Well, whatever. The beastmen can be considered somewhat competent," Ogras reluctantly agreed. "Much better than the riff-raff we scrounged together from the former slaves of Verdant Green. But you shouldn't expect things to go this smoothly at the other Incursions. This Verana seems weak-hearted, treating both her beasts and slaves with unusual care."

"I know," Zac sighed. "But better make friends than enemies where we can."

The two sat down and rested for an hour until Verana finally came back.

"I have spoken with my elders and they have agreed to your proposal, though the terms of our future co-operation will be decided when this planet is released from its isolation," Verana said.

Zac immediately agreed as that was better for him as well. He could only imagine that his position could improve as he grew stronger in the future, which would let him keep more of the benefits.

"We will leave 600 of our people, half of which are warriors as you requested," Verana added. "They know that they will be part of your influence, but they are Tir'Emarel in the end. They will not accept any orders to be used as fodder or do things against their conscience."

Zac was internally elated at the number of warriors he just gained. Three hundred veterans were as good an addition as his whole demonkin force, and far more valuable than thousands of his recruits.

“Will you be staying behind as well?” Zac probed, hoping he would get another powerhouse under his command.

“No, my grandmother does not allow it, and has ordered me to return,” she said, actually looking a bit disappointed. “I will leave two of my generals to manage our interests though, and they should be a greater addition than some flakey demon silk pants.”

“Have fun cultivating like a bird in a cage while we conquer a world and explore the multiverse,” Ogras snorted in return.

The three went over the details for a while longer, until Zac insisted on checking out the situation of the humans that lived within the Incursion. If the people of Earth had been secretly treated as cattle everything they had decided until now was moot, but Zac was relieved to find that the situation was as they had heard.

The humans within the Tal-Eladar didn’t live luxuriant lives, but they were better off compared to most people since the integration. They had a roof over their heads, they were fed, and the Tal-Eladar kept any beasts at bay. They weren’t even stopped from cultivating, though they were expected to provide a certain work-quota every day first.

Still, many had secretly held some hatred for the Tal-Eladar and were screaming for blood when they learned that the Super Brother-Man had conquered the area. Zac ignored those clamors, even if it caused some dissatisfaction. Zac could only hope that they would understand when they learned how the rest of the world fared since the integration.

After making sure everything was under control they watched the thousands of Tal-Eladar stream through the large portal the Nexus Hub had opened. A few looked despondent, but most actually looked relieved, like they were finally heading home after a long time abroad.

To Zac’s left the hundreds of people who would stay behind were lined up, bidding farewell to their people. It looked like Verana hadn’t compelled anyone to stay behind since most of them had excited expressions on their faces even though they knew they would be stranded here for a hundred years.

Staying behind was a risk, but it also provided many opportunities. If they survived the initial phase they could enjoy the Origin Dao for at least a decade longer, besides the other benefits that cropped up on a newly integrated world. It was an opportunity that most people in their situation could only dream of.

He did occasionally sense some killing intent coming in his direction from the soldiers though. Zac knew it was most likely due to the army he decimated earlier. It was inevitable that his rampage had caused some bad blood, but he could only hope they would do their job. It all came down to the two generals who Verana left behind.