

The Fall 311

Chapter 311: Peak

Zac judged that the two leaders were around the same level as his demonkin generals. One was a mage while the other was a beastmaster like Verana. The beastmaster was named Jinan, and he would take a co-leadership role of this area along with whoever Adran appointed.

The mage was called Tylia, and she would join the Strike squad as support and ranged firepower. She was a nature mage, one that possessed some healing capabilities along with mainly control spells. Healers were something that Zac desperately lacked, and he felt it would be a great addition when going after the Incursions.

However, a change happened at the last moment before the Incursion closed. Verana who had stayed behind to make sure all her people passed through suddenly turned to Jinan.

"Jinan, take my place. I will stay behind after all," she said.

"What?" Jinan said with some shock. "What about the Grand Matriarch? She will skin us alive."

Zac and Ogras only looked on with interest. It looked like the young mistress of the Tir'Emarel was a bit wilful after all. Verana took out a crystal and placed it on her forehead for a few seconds before giving it to her general.

"Give this to grandma, I'm sure she'll understand. I am betting on this baby planet for the future of our family," Verana said as she dragged Jinan to the Nexus Hub, and veritably threw him inside moments before it closed.

"That's what I get for taunting her," Ogras muttered under his breath. "A silly girl with dreams of adventure."

"It's not like it's the first time your mouth has gotten you into trouble," Zac said, suddenly in an excellent mood.

Not only did he get another powerhouse at Ogras' level, but he also had a feeling that adding the Tal-Eladar to his force would balance it out. Currently, most of the important positions in Port Atwood were held by the demons, but the demonkin and Tal-Eladar would restrain each other, allowing his human faction to grow stronger while they competed.

If Verana went according to her original plan the elves would only have two generals and would not be able to have as great an impact as the demons. But with Verana and her two beasts holding down the fort they suddenly became an equal force as clan Azh'Rezak.

"I guess you're stuck with us for the time being," Zac said as he turned to Verana who was walking back toward them.

"I felt uncomfortable leaving my people to the whims of that one," Verana said as she threw a look at Ogras.

Ogras only rolled his eyes in annoyance but decided to keep his mouth shut for once.

"We will head out to the next Incursion almost immediately. Do you want to join us?" Zac probed.

"Lulu needs more time to recover, and they both need at least a week of rest. I used a berserking skill on them to push them to their limits, and if I send them to battle now it will truly harm them. I will stay and organize things here," Verana said.

"That's fine," Zac nodded, not surprised in hearing about her pets. "Figure things out with Adran or Abby, my two head administrators. I don't allow slaves, so figure out a system for the people who live here."

"You should take Tylia though," Verana added, which was just fine with Zac.

The integration of the Zone went far smoother compared to the Ez'Mahal Incursion. Thanks to the Tal-Eladar staying behind Zac only needed to leave some peacekeeping troops before his group was able to move toward their next target. He also instructed Adran to move the former slaves who caused trouble to some of his other towns so that they wouldn't cause any further unrest.

Zac chose one of the easier targets after Tylia had entered the contract of secrecy. That way she wouldn't be able to tell anyone about his undead form in case he was forced to use it, not even to her own master. Zac could only thank the Apostate of Order for creating the system of binding contracts.

The Incursion was situated by a large volcano and was controlled by some species that looked like a mix of humans and dragons. The assault started out fine, with Billy utterly destroying their erected defenses with a tremendous smash, but trouble cropped up almost immediately.

The battle produced their first casualties, even though they followed their strike plan and Tylia performed above expectations. Two demons and a Valkyrie fell in battle, which wasn't a lot of people, but still a sizeable chunk of the small elite troop. They hadn't done anything wrong, but they had been forced to defend against a much too strong an enemy.

The problem rather lay with Ogras who had performed far beneath what was expected. The two of them currently stood in front of the three bodies who had been cleaned and lined up. They would be sent back to Port Atwood to be properly buried later today. Zac felt especially bad about the Valkyrie.

Her name was Jennifer and was among the first dozen to follow him back in Greenworth. She wasn't a cultivator, but she had desperately clawed her way toward the top of the Valkyries with sheer effort. Yet now she lay here unmoving, grisly wound covering her body.

Death could come at any moment.

"What's going on with you? I've seen your strength, and it looked like you were holding back," Zac finally asked after Ogras failed to speak up. "Now we lost three competent fighters."

It wasn't that Ogras had shirked his duties during the battle - it was rather the opposite. He had desperately fought with his spear to take down the generals while Zac battled the leader and his support squad. But the shadows which were a large part of his repertoire had been completely absent, which left the demon with almost no battlefield presence.

It had allowed one of the general to veer off against the exhausted Billy and the demons, and if it wasn't for Tylia half the squad might have been eradicated before Zac unleashed [Hatchetman's Rage] to fight almost the whole Incursion alone.

"It's that god damn lunatic," Ogras finally spat out after some hesitation.

"What? Who are you talking about?" Zac asked with confusion.

"The Umbra," Ogras sighed.

"Kenzie told me you looked bad after exiting the Inheritance, what's going on?" Zac probed.

"I got quite a few benefits inside, but the man called Rez also forced something extremely troublesome on me. He had found an odd entity that lived within other's shadows in his journeys. Like a parasite. He never found a way to utilize it while alive, but he always believed it had great potential to strengthen one's shadows," Ogras explained. "So he used me as an experiment to find out if he was correct."

"Let me guess, he made the two of you merge?" Zac sighed.

"Knocked me out, and when I woke up I had this netherblasted critter in my shadows," Ogras growled, and waved his hand.

A blob of shadows grew from his arm, and a terrifying face appeared in front of them. It reminded Zac a bit of the ghastly beings from the hunt, though this thing seemed more corporeal. It soundlessly screeched at the two of them before it once again receded into Ogras' shadow.

"Pretty creepy," Zac muttered.

"Tell me about it," Ogras said with a shake of his head.

"But what does that have to do with this battle?" Zac asked.

"Its presence has increased both the power and volume of my shadows, but my control has lessened. It normally doesn't interfere, but it looks like it doesn't like fire. The moment we entered the battle and all the flame-attuned energies started swirling about it hid deep within my shadows, making me unable to send out any attacks," Ogras helplessly explained.

Zac shook his head, inwardly swearing at Brazla, both the real one and the Tool Spirit. Forcing people to pay for treasures by setting up inheritances was clearly a great way to create death traps for one's descendants. Zac suddenly felt lucky he only got a predecessor who was just a bit eccentric and disinterested in passing on his true inheritance.

"Any other surprises waiting for me?" Zac sighed. "We don't have a lot of people to spare, you know."

"I have no idea, I didn't even know the parasite had this weakness. That asshole didn't really leave an instruction manual. He just gave me a couple of rewards and told me to come back in a decade if I survived the fusion. Going to come back alright, if just to kill that ghost," Ogras swore.

Ogras' powers having turned unstable was a wrench in the plans, but he was still the strongest fighter on the squad even without his shadows. Besides Zac himself, of course. And so far the only weakness

they had encountered was that of fire, and there were no other clear fire-attuned enemies apart from the incursion in the underworld.

This time it took two days to get everything in order. The addition of Tylia sped up the recovery of those who were hurt, helping the soldiers get back to fighting strength in record time. The dragonlings were one of the forces that killed or pushed out all other races from their lands, so taking control of the volcano didn't require any work at all. They simply erected a teleporter and sent a dozen scouts to scour the area for anything of value.

One good thing that came out of Zac being forced to go all out was that he felt he was getting extremely close to finally gaining his level. So he immediately opened the teleporter to their next target the moment that everyone was healed up and ready to go. The soldiers had taken the deaths in stride, as they all knew that assaulting multiple forces in short order was an extremely risky venture.

But the gains were quite impressive as well. Joanna had informed him that the Valkyries had all received a quest after they closed the third Incursion. It was an Incursion closing quest sort of like the one he gained for the demonic Incursion, but it gave out variable rewards depending on how many they managed to close in the coming month. So they were the ones most eager to get going, even though they mourned the death of Jennifer.

The fourth target was another humanoid race, but this time things didn't go according to plan either. As Zac sat in the front seat and played with the mental puzzle he suddenly got a bad premonition. He immediately took out his axe, which alerted the others in the car.

"Something is wrong," Zac only had time to say before a huge number of projectiles flew straight at their cars.

Zac immediately activated [Nature's Barrier], and infused it with the Seed of Sanctuary. The skill had no problem covering the entirety of the convoy since the seed had been upgraded to the middle stage from the Dao Impartment. But the ambush cost him over half his cosmic energy as he was forced to reform countless leaves to keep his people safe until they could get in position.

Ogras disappeared from his position in the back seat, and immediately after he appeared in the sky above the cars, two huge black wings covering his back. He was clearly anxious to regain his honor from the last battle, even to the point that he used his ultimate transformation. He thrummed with unrestrained power as a sea of shadows swallowed a large sector of the forest that hid the invaders.

Wails of pain echoed among the trees as innumerable shadow lances destroyed anything within reach. One of the leaders of the ambush even fell from a beam of concentrated shadows before Zac even had time to reach the hastily formed defensive lines.

The strength of the response to their ambush had flustered the invaders, and a few even started to run away when they saw Zac barrel toward them, his towering aura spreading out in all directions. Only a small core of elites maintained the ranks, and they formed a small elite unit to counter his advance. But they were an established force of the multi-verse, and they had their own hidden aces.

A huge golden bell appeared in the sky above the leaders of the ambush, while the leader of the ambush held a perfect miniature copy of it. His eyes met Zac's, and the next moment he swung the bell with a

somber expression. His face turned completely pallid, and it even looked like he aged a bit from the action.

A towering aura was suddenly released from the bell, and it was as though it was sentient. Zac felt an extremely powerful presence focusing on him, and he only had time to summon another layer of leaves before the bell rung. Its chime contained a mysterious force, and the moment it hit Zac he immediately fell over, his vision turning black.

When he woke up again he saw the backs of the Valkyries standing in front of him, desperately maintaining a barrier as he heard Billy's bellow ahead. He quickly got to his feet again with some embarrassment and rushed forward after activating [Mental Fortress]. That bell unleashed a terrifying mental attack, and he had forgotten to protect against that type of assault after being pelted by normal spells and arrows.

A glance around the battlefield proved that they had still managed to keep the advantage even with his own incapacitation, in large part thanks to Ogras huge expenditure of Cosmic Energy. Zac noted that the demon's aura was starting to get unstable, and immediately flashed forward with [Loamwalker] to relieve the pressure.

The moment he truly entered the fray was also the beginning of the end of the battle. The invading army had already lost all of their momentum from the massive losses Ogras and Billy had caused, and the addition of Zac at full fighting strength completely broke their spirits.

The Incursion truly had put everything in this ambush, as they fielded four generals and the Incursion leader himself in the fight. He had tried to flee at the last minute, but Zac ran him down and cut him in two. The moment he tried to kill them all with a sneak attack was the moment he sealed his fate.

Zac stood over the bisected body of the E-Grade leader, his eyes closed as a huge amount of cosmic energy washed over him.

He had finally reached the peak of the F-Grade.