

The Fall 331

Chapter 331: Truths and Lies

Zac, who was about to head over to interrogate the two terrified merchants stopped in his tracks when he heard Emily's cry. He turned over with confusion to see the teenager clawing at the manacles binding a malnourished teenager.

"Don't let those two move," Zac said to Joanna, who nodded in confirmation.

He walked over to Emily and with a tug ripped the chains apart, freeing the young woman.

"What's going on?" he asked as he turned to Emily.

"This is Millie, Camilla. She went to the same school as me. She's from Allentown!" she said with some panic in her eyes.

Zac understood the thoughts running through her head. If one of her schoolmates had found herself captured by the Union, then it wasn't a great sign for the well-being of her siblings. They might even be in the large pile of corpses.

"Calm down, we'll get to the bottom of things," Zac said as he took out a healing pill.

Millie wasn't truly wounded, but she was clearly malnourished and it looked like she had been whipped judging by the tears in her tunic's back. But mostly she seemed to have shut down from trauma. She looked at Zac with a blank stare and only took the pill when he directly put it in her hands.

"This is a healing pill," Zac said before taking a step back, aware of the immense pressure he had just released across the whole town.

"Millie, it's me, Emily Larkin from Southfield High," she said as she handed Millie a canteen. "Hurry and take the pill to regain your strength."

The mention of the school seemed to wake the girl out from her stupor, and she rapidly blinked at Emily.

"Emily? From class B? I never saw you in the tutorial, what's going on?" the girl asked, making some of the close-by slaves surreptitiously look over.

"I was too young to enter the tutorial. We come from the surface," Emily explained after receiving a nod from Zac. "We work for the Super Brother-Man, and we have come to close the incursions in the Underworld. But when we arrived we heard about the Union capturing people and selling them to the invaders, so we came here first to free you."

The words were like a match igniting a fire, and a wave of clamors for help rose from the captives. The situation felt a bit annoying, but when Zac looked around he couldn't find the demon or Verana anywhere. Both were keeping a low profile as to not spread any rumors about invaders before their position was completely solidified.

"What about the other cultivators of Allentown? Where are they?" Emily pressed on. "Do you know where my siblings are? Oscar and Johanna."

"The town we were dropped off in was destroyed by the flame golems four months ago," Millie said with a sigh. "But most of us managed to flee since it had so many exits. Some of us settled in various towns, others joined the Union or the Council. I think your sister joined the Council to fight the invaders."

"And my brother? Do you know what happened to Oscar, Oscar Larkin?" Emily hurriedly asked.

"He... Died..." Millie said, looking down at the ground. "He joined the town guard after the tutorial ended. The flame golems killed all the guards to cause chaos and slow our response."

Emily slumped down on the ground when she heard the news, a blank stare in her face. Zac sighed with a pang of sadness in his heart. He knew had been the most likely outcome from the start with how few that were still alive after the integration.

"Let's find your sister. She'll know what happened for sure," Zac said as he crouched down next to Emily.

The teenager quickly perked up, desperately grasping on to his words.

"You're right! Millie, you never saw Oscar die, right?" she said, getting a hesitant nod in response. "He might have survived!"

Zac personally wasn't so sure, especially considering the actions of her sister. Joining the Council to fight the invaders sounded like something a person looking for revenge would do. But he didn't say anything, not wanting to dash her hopes. After giving the teenager a comforting pat he walked over to Joanna, who still kept guard over the terrified merchants.

Emily's words had been heard by quite a few people in the camp, and the clamors from the slaves were getting louder and louder. Conversely, the guards had turned even more subdued, looking like they wished they could simply sink into the ground.

"Can you handle this?" Zac asked with a wave toward the ruckus when he came back.

"Sure, but could you silence them first?" Joanna said.

Zac nodded, and another burst of his aura erupted through the camp, immediately cutting all conversations short. Joanna winked at him before jumping up at a rooftop, making her visible to all the captured slaves.

"I am Joanna Thompson, Ranked at the 96th spot of the power ladder," she said, her voice echoing across the camp. "As some of you heard, we come from the surface. Zachary Atwood, also known as the Super Brother-Man is currently busy closing the Incursions on the surface, leading humanity in the battle against the invaders. But after hearing of the plight of the Underworld he spared no expense to find a way to reach this place. We have come to liberate you all, and rebuff the underworld invaders."

Another wave of exclamations immediately erupted in the crowd. Some were jubilant while others were confused. There were also a decent number of people who suspiciously looked at the proceedings, perhaps not trusting such a fantastical tale.

"You might be skeptical, but let me show you something," Joanna said, and the next moment a System screen appeared in front of her.

It was the quest that she and the other Valkyries received after closing three Incursions, where they were supposed to assist in closing as many Incursions as possible within a month. It already showed the progress of four, meaning that golem incursion she assisted in closing before she received the quest was counted as well.

“As you can see I have personally assisted the forces of Port Atwood in closing four incursions, just one shy of the total number of Incursions in the underworld. The Super Brother-Man has closed even more, sometimes only relying on his own power,” she explained. “I only show you this to prove the truth of my words.”

“However, when we finally arrived at the Underworld we quickly learned of the despicable acts of the Union, enslaving our people and siding with our enemies. The Super Brother-Man wouldn’t stand for such a thing, so from today forth the Union will cease to exist,” Joanna said, looking like a heroic general with the spear in her hand.

“So please be patient. We will help everyone here, but it will take some time,” she finished.

Zac felt a bit embarrassed by the grandiose speech, and he didn’t really know what to say when the Valkyrie jumped back down on the ground.

“Lord Atwood works so hard, but never claims any credit,” Joanna said as she pointedly looked at Zac. “Someone needed to speak up for him.”

He coughed and nodded in thanks before turning to the merchants.

“You- The Union are no traitors! We have worked hard to protect the people in the underworld!” one of the men said, but his eyes were skittering and the fear was clear on his face.

Zac didn’t bother responding only taking a pointed glance at the rows upon rows of captured slaves.

“We are facing an extinction event,” the merchant said. “If we didn’t provide people to the incursions they would start raiding our settlements, resulting in a far larger loss of life. Besides, these people are convicted criminals!”

“Lies!” one of the slaves roared in anger. “We were only too poor to pay the protection fees of the Union.”

After calling over Smaug and questioning both the merchants and a few of the slave's Zac finally got a full understanding of the situation. In the beginning, the Union truly only sold murderers, rapists, and other heinous criminals to the Incursions. It was a simple solution to get rid of dangerous people while also appeasing a very strong enemy.

But the Incursion’s demands for slaves were insatiable, and the Union ran out of criminals soon enough. So eventually they started to capture anyone that didn’t provide any benefits to them or was unable to pay the fees to live within their cities, convicting them with fabricated charges.

When that wasn’t enough they started to target whole settlements that wanted to relocate to the Union for safety. The slaves in the transit camp, including Emily's schoolmate, were almost all of the latter type, with a few enemies of the Union thrown in.

Both of the merchants were just middle-management sent to inspect the latest batch of slaves before delivery, and they knew nothing of the inner workings of the Union or the situation of Smaug's sister. They were also only level 35, their strength completely propped up by Crystals.

Zac knew just how many crystals were needed to reach such a high level. The Nexus Crystals were a good boost for recovery, but they were only really useful for leveling right at the beginning of a stage. Even the E-Grade crystals he got his hands on were only enough for a scant few levels, and Zac had already confirmed that E-Grade crystals were still quite rare in the underworld as well. They were not something that these two people could get their hands on.

Soon enough there was nothing else the two merchants could divulge, and Zac ended their lives with two quick swipes of his sword before turning to Smaug. The merchants had already been doomed the moment they started to dabble in slavery, and the kills didn't even register in Zac's mind.

"How do we get to New London?" Zac asked Smaug who looked down at the two lifeless bodies with some shock.

"I own another hidden outpost an hour's travel away," Smaug quickly explained after he roused himself. "We should hurry. They have likely already realized that this place has been conquered. Hopefully they'll assume the invaders got tired of paying for the slaves and raided the place."

"Couldn't you have placed your teleporters closer?" Zac muttered with some complaint.

"It's not possible, don't you know? If I placed it any closer a quest would start where only one town could remain within a month," Smaug said with a shake of his head. "Towns of competing factions can't be too close."

"Oh, there's such a thing?" Zac said with some surprise.

"It's true, and the distance only increases as the rank of the town is upgraded," Verana said as she walked over. "Lower-ranked towns can be pretty close, but capitals requires over a week of travel, limiting the number of kingdoms on a planet."

Zac nodded in understanding before dragging Smaug over to the building with the teleporter. The spatial disruption had already dissipated, which allowed Zac to bring a squad of soldiers over to handle the situation in the camp. Of course, the demons still stayed behind as to not expose their identities.

The slaves would be transported to the Underworld Nexus for now, since staying at the transit camp wasn't an option. The camp was placed extremely close to the Incursion, and the invaders could come knocking at any moment. Zac felt there was no need to expend resources to defend it either since it held no strategic value.

The group of Ogras, Verana, Joanna, Smaug, and Emily once again joined Zac and left through the teleporter after the soldiers had taken charge of the slaves, quickly freeing them and sending them away. And thanks to Smaug they managed to quickly and effortlessly infiltrate New London. Smaug clearly had all kinds of contacts and confidantes, as they entered the large city through a hidden passageway that led into the cellar of a bar. When the owner noticed the group walking up the stairs he pretended to see nothing and simply went about his day.

Soon the group stood in an alley some distance from the sprawling headquarters of the Union. It was actually the Admiralty House of London that had been randomized to the Underworld along with a large section of downtown London.

New London was the central hub of The Union, and it was one of the few large settlements that were placed in the open Underworld rather than in a town cave. This had benefited the Union quite a bit when the Flame Golems went on the offensive, flooding one cave after another. Hundreds of thousands of settlers had wanted to relocate to New London, rather braving the Underworld beasts than the Fire Golems.

The large conglomerate had claimed a large number of former Government buildings and turned them into their own. The old world government itself had quickly fallen with the return of the cultivators, and after a couple of tumultuous weeks, the Union became the premier force in the town. And with the help of the resources they got from the slave trade their grasp of the town was rock solid.

"I'll go fetch the girl," Ogras said without any preamble, holding a picture of a young girl in his hand.

"Are you sure you can do this?" Smaug said with worry as he took out a handful of things from his hidden space. "I have a few items-"

Ogras immediately snatched all of the treasures, though Zac suspected that the demon wouldn't need help to infiltrate some old-world structure with no real powerhouses standing guard. And just as Zac suspected the demon was back just twenty minutes later, with a squirming sack over his shoulder. Smaug immediately ran over to release his sister, but Ogras suddenly summoned his black spear and used it to keep the man at bay.

"We need to have a little chat. This brat has been a captive for weeks, not a few hours as you said."