

The Fall 333

Chapter 333: The Underworld Council

Things went quite smoothly after the bodyguards were subdued. The leaders of the Union were swiftly captured and imprisoned as the forces of Port Atwood were called over. Ogras wanted to summarily execute everyone to make an example, but Zac decided on a proper investigation and trial.

The Union was a huge enterprise, and it soon became obvious that not everyone was aware of the slave trade, even at the top. In fact, in the meeting that Zac interrupted, it wasn't obvious that it was a slave camp they lost, but it was rather called a mining camp. Everyone had known about the trade with the invaders, but many thought they were using raw materials rather than people as a currency.

When Zac explained the situation with the slaves, everyone professed their ignorance of the matter, staunchly arguing that they only dealt with traditional business ventures. But as the days passed Calrin and his gnomes easily unraveled who was guilty and benefitted through the revenue streams, and with the interrogations that a shrouded Ogras led they soon had a full picture of what was going on.

As for the normal employees of the Union, things went even smoother than Zac could ever have expected. Verana had been proven right. The moment they started to release the news that they only wanted to deal with the brass because of the slave trade, the normal workers quickly calmed down.

There were a few that fled and disappeared among the large population, either for fear of the unknown, or perhaps because they had done something they were afraid would be unearthed. But most happily went about their days, especially after Zac increased the general salaries by 25%.

But taking charge of the sprawling entity that was the Union wouldn't take just a day or two. There were so many businesses with complicated relationships, and dozens of strategic resources to inspect. Luckily they had the whole network in their hands already.

The Union had used the same type of system as the New World Government, with one Lord creating a hub for all the mayors in the network. It wasn't clear who the true Lord was, but many believed it to be Little Treasure who had fled before Zac made his entrance. And since he even didn't stay behind to defend his domain when their headquarters was assaulted the whole system was immediately awarded to Zac as the assaulting Lord.

Zac himself was mostly uninterested in the practical proceedings and rather focused on the massive archives of intelligence that the Union had gathered the past months. Their secret intelligence dossiers on the demonkin and human Incursions were probably even more thorough than the Council's due to their frequent encounters.

He knew he had to deal with the Demon Incursion as quickly as possible, but he was a bit unsure of what to do. The reason he came here in his undead form was to level up his Undead Class, but after his recent battles he felt there were some clear limitations to his Undying Bulwark Class as it currently stood.

Most of his skills were aimed at keeping himself alive, with [Deathwish] being his only offensive skill along with his learned skill [Unholy Strike]. He still kept training his utilization of the Dao every day with the trinket, but it would be some time until he could activate [Cyclic Strike].

The lack of offensive and movement skills made his impact on a battlefield limited. It was not like a video game, he didn't have any taunt skills that forced all enemies to attack him. The moment the invaders realized he was a tough nut to crack they could simply assault his allies, completely circumventing both [Deathwish] and [Immutable Bulwark]. His whole plan was for naught if his gained levels came at the cost of the lives of his friends.

But as he read through the stacks of intelligence of the Underworld he found a possible solution to his problem in one of the scouting reports. But before he had time to send for the person who submitted this report a Valkyrie knocked on the door to the office he had commandeered for himself.

"I am sorry to disturb you," the Valkyrie said after entering. "Some ambassadors from the Underworld Council is here, what do you want to do?"

"So they came after all. Took them longer than we expected. Have Joanna and Sap Trang join me in Conference Room C," Zac said as he donned his mask.

He had kept his modified appearance throughout the visit, but he only wore the mask when in public. As he walked through the richly decorated halls he sighed in wonder. Most of the original interiors remained, but most electrical functions had been swapped out with day crystals. It was an interesting mix of the old old world and the post-integration era, and it actually meshed quite well.

The old fisherman and Joanna joined him soon after he sat down at the ornate table, and just minutes later three warriors entered the room. It was two humans and one of the molemen, each of them radiating even stronger auras than the bodyguards of the union. And it was clear that this power came from battle rather than absorbing crystals and eating pills.

The female moleman especially gave off the aura of a powerhouse, and Zac realized that she might be at the same level as someone like Thea. It was to the point that he was a bit tempted to use [Inquisitive Eye], but he knew that it would likely fail or even backfire. The other two were likely rankers as well, or at worst just shy of making the cut.

One of the humans was a middle-aged man that was built like a bear with a large sword on his back. With his large bushy beard he gave off the aura of a brute, but an intelligent light in his eyes indicated he wasn't all brawn. The other human was an old lady with graying hair. She didn't have any distinguishing items on her, but two snowballs slowly rotated around her, meaning she was likely some sort of ice mage.

The moleman had two large daggers fastened to her waist, and from the aura they emitted Zac realized they were actually one Spirit Tool. Spirit Tools that were split into dual items were far harder to create from what Zac understood, making them as rare as defensive Spirit Tools, or perhaps even rarer.

That this rogue had gotten her hands on such a good item proved once more she had survived some trials and found her lucky encounters, just like him. The only way she could have gotten such a good item was if she completed some harsh quest from the system.

It was clear that the Underworld Council hadn't sent some middlemen to meet with him, but rather some of their core warriors.

“Welcome,” Sap Trang said with a kindly smile. “I am Sap Trang, ambassador of Port Atwood. This is Joanna, leader of the Valkyries, and lastly Mr. Black. We apologize for not getting in contact with the Underworld Council sooner, our time down here has been a bit hectic.”

“I’d say,” the large man said with a wry smile. “I am-“

“Wait,” the moleman interjected, looking at Zac with animosity. “You are no human. You are not one of the four founding races. You reek of death, and not like a warrior.”

Zac was a bit surprised that his origin was immediately exposed by the moleman. Not even the people of Port Atwood knew he wasn’t human. They just thought he had gotten some odd class like Death Knight, which gave him such a spooky aura.

After hesitating for a second he removed his mask, exposing his deathly pale skin and pitch-black eyes. The burly man couldn’t stop himself from twitching when he saw the eyes that seemingly led into an endless abyss, and the old woman frowned in consternation.

“Your senses are sharp,” Zac said, not surprised about the reactions. “I am undead.”

“So The Super Brother-Man gobbles up the Union because they work with the invaders, while himself working with invaders,” the moleman said, some anger burning in her eyes.

“Lara-,” the man said, but was stopped by a glare.

Zac smiled slightly at the accusation, not angry at the questioning. If anything it proved that at least the Council hadn’t gotten their priorities mixed up, and truly tried to stop the invaders.

“Lord Atwood recognizes that the world is not black or white,” Sap Trang explained. “The Incursions are a problem that needs to be dealt with, but it doesn’t mean he can’t recruit talents from the various factions that have invaded our planet. It helps us to gain all sorts of information, allowing us to adapt to this new reality much faster. Just like the Council have benefited from the Union’s trade with the invaders.”

“But what we’re doing is different from the Union. The aliens working for Lord Atwood have already had their Incursions closed, making them dependent on Port Atwood. Lord Atwood would also never sell or sacrifice our own people,” Joanna added. “You should understand, the moment an invader uses a teleportation array, it means they have truly given up on invading Earth, meaning everyone here works for Lord Atwood.”

The moleman didn’t seem completely satisfied with the explanation, but she didn’t press the issue further as she sat down with a harrumph.

“I am sorry about the questioning,” the man said with a smile. “We have been isolated down here, constantly fighting the invaders for months. I am Gregor, and these two are Oksana and Lararia. We are three of the 11 seats of the Underworld council.”

“What brings the Underworld Council here today?” Joanna asked.

“First we simply wanted to make your acquaintance, but we also wish to inquire about your future plans,” Gregor said.

“We cannot divulge any specifics, but suffice to say our goal is to close the incursions of the underworld, which would allow us to focus on the real enemies of Earth,” Joanna said.

“Real enemies?” Gregor said with confusion. “Who would that be?”

“You should have heard of two of them. Inevitability and Harbinger, the two top positions on the ladder for the hunt,” Joanna said. “But what you might not know is that those two are under command of someone far more dangerous.”

From there Joanna proceeded to explain the situation about The Great Redeemer and the impending threat he posed. The trio mostly listened silently, sometimes interjecting with incisive questions.

“We learned about the existence of these people from the Zhix down here even before the hunt,” Gregor said with a frown. “And we have heard about the Dominators from their old world as well. But who would have thought that was just the beginning of the conspiracy?”

“Not even Lord Atwood is ready to fight against the Dominators just yet. They are monstrously strong and possess hidden means provided by their master. But he’s desperately cultivating to gain the power to stop them, and we hope the Council will join us in that battle when the time comes,” Joanna said.

“This topic is far beyond our expectations, and we cannot speak for the whole Council on this matter. But I joined the battle to protect Earth and secure a position in the multiverse. I won’t shy away from any battle to protect our home, no matter if it’s invaders or Dominators,” Gregor said, and the old lady nodded in agreement.

Zac internally breathed out in relief, as one of the most important goals of the Underworld was somewhat accomplished. The discussions went on for a while, and it became clear that one of the biggest worries of the Underworld Council had been that Zac wanted to gobble up the whole Underworld. That he was only using the fight with the Invaders as an excuse to get his foot in the door.

But the fact that they could easily prove that they had closed multiple incursions through Joanna’s quest quickly warmed the council members, and discussions rather moved to the topic of cooperation. Zac eventually decided to send over a group of ambassadors to get a better understanding of the battle with the Fire Golems. The squad would also act as Emily’s protectors while she looked for her sister since he didn’t have time to go himself.

A large problem with the golems was that they were the only force seemingly unencumbered by the extremely hard rock in the Underworld, allowing them to freely create new paths, and flood the ones the Council used with Lava. The council could only perform quick raids against the golems nowadays, afraid that their path of retreat would be cut off.

So the fact that a group of extremely powerful people had entered the Underworld brought hope for the Council that they could finally launch a decisive strike against the core of the Golem Incursion, Stopping the threat for good.

“Can we ask when Lord Atwood plans on moving against the Fire Golems? They are the largest threat to the survival of the Underworld,” Gregor finally asked.

Neither Joanna or Sap Trang dared to speak up regarding this subject, as Zac still hadn't made his decision on how to proceed. There was the issue of the demon Incursion, and also that report that had caught his eye. After mulling it over for a few seconds Zac looked up at Gregor.

"There are some things we need to deal with before we turn our eyes toward the Fire Golem Incursion. But we hope to launch an all-out strike within three weeks at the latest."