

The Fall 512

Chapter 512: Regret

Verana sat by a flowerbed in her garden, absentmindedly stroking Lulu's soft fur as the beast slept in her lap while cradling a beast crystal. A sense of impending doom had filled her heart the entire day, and she finally knew it was time for a reckoning the moment Lys hurried into her room with worry in her eyes. Not that her maid needed to explain what was going on as she had already received the prompt.

Zachary Atwood had arrived.

The humans under her employ had already divulged his evolution and explosive gain in levels over the past days, and the fact that their surroundings weren't drowned in Miasma was proof enough of what had transpired. The young master of the Brindevalt had sent a message as well five hours ago, confirming her hunch. The Undead Empire was thrown off from this baby world, making Zachary Atwood its de-facto leader.

This should normally have been a joyous occasion, but she had messed up. She had been frozen in hesitation about the implications of offending the undead and the Church of the Everlasting Dao, until the point that they lost connection through the teleporter. Now Zac was back, and his thoughts about their actions were known only to himself.

Why had she hesitated back then? It was not like either of those forces were on good terms with the Tal-Eladar. In fact, it was the opposite, with the higher-tiered tribes having joined more than one excursion to curtail the expansion of the Undead Kingdoms.

She finally understood the weight of command that her grandmother had tried teaching her about, but now it might be too late. Her mind ran a mile a minute as she tried to figure out the optimal path to take from here on out. There was a palpable pressure on her as the course of the meeting might decide whether she and her people would survive the day.

Because one thing was clear. If the Super Brother-Man had arrived with the intent to kill, then there was nothing she could do. He had taken out almost a dozen forces stronger than heirs, and even the undead wasn't a match to him. She still couldn't believe it as she had seen him in action on multiple occasions, but it was hard to argue with the facts placed in front of her.

She finally concluded that her best course of action was to feign ignorance; that she was preparing her forces to assist when Port Atwood was under attack, but the arrays had suddenly disappeared just when they were about to set out. So she adorned a welcoming smile when the human and his annoying companion stepped into her garden.

Verana gasped as she felt a terrifying pressure spread out through her backyard. Zachary Atwood was clearly making his stance known, and the few attendants were forced to flee from the immense pressure as the flora was pushed to the ground. Even Verana felt the strain, and Lulu whined in her lap as she was startled awake, her little muscles growing taut.

There was no longer any confusion about how Zachary Atwood had defeated the undead after feeling this terrorizing aura. It was almost incomprehensible how much he had grown since they last met. Verana already knew that he had gone off-world for some opportunity, but just what kind of encounter

could utterly transform someone to this degree? She still maintained the smile though, wanting to make it feel like nothing was amiss.

However, that smile turned extremely forced when she heard Zac's first words.

"I thought you would have left for the Brindevalt Clan by now."

Zac looked at the frozen smile of Verana with a snort before he sat down opposite her.

"I am not sure what you've heard, but I assure you that the Tir'Emarel Family has upheld their part of the agreement without any deviance," Verana said after a second. "We have not divulged any information about you to the Brindevalt. I feared the worst had happened to you when we lost contact, and we sought out an ally."

"You know, I wondered what made you so willing to stay behind on a planet invaded by not only the undead but also the insane cultists," Zac said, freely speaking his thoughts. "It turns out you had an escape route from the beginning."

"Can't trust the pointy-ears, they are only true to their beasts," Ogras snorted from the side, drawing an angered look from Verana.

"I can understand how it looks, but I hope that you can understand my predicament. I wanted to assist, but I also had orders from my family to not offend any powerful forces while I was cut off from the clan. By the time I found the resolve to go against my family's wishes we had lost connection to Port Atwood," Verana explained. "Also, I believe the Brindevalt can become a great asset as well. They are--"

"You can send a message to your friends," Zac cut her off. "I am heading back to consolidate my gains. But I will head out and slaughter every invading force that remains on Earth the moment I'm done. They better be gone within the week unless they're ready to face me in battle."

Zac stood up, not caring that Verana's smiling face had turned into an emotionless mask, her eyes the only thing that betrayed the churning emotions within.

"I'll uphold my bargain, you are welcome to stay as a trading partner. However, since you're unwilling to fight for this planet's survival, then you can forget about taking part in its resources. I will see any expansion from the Tal-Eladar as an act of war, and I will act swiftly in response," Zac said as he walked out without another word.

He had said what needed to be said, and he was in no mood to stay any longer. His wholesale slaughter of the zombie horde had tired him out, and he just wanted to sleep for a few hours. Ogras stood up as well, but he didn't immediately join Zac as he left. Instead, he turned toward Verana with a grin.

"What?" she snorted with annoyance after Zac had left the garden. "Don't pretend a calculating coward like you would have acted any different when faced with such a situation."

"I might be a coward, but I at least have a nose for opportunity. You've just pissed off the first person to reach the 9th floor of the Tower of Eternity in a million years," Ogras said, his grin almost splitting his face apart. "You better pray that the Tribal Elders of your race doesn't sacrifice your whole clan as a form of appeasement to the second coming of the Eveningtide Asura."

“WHAT?!” Verana exclaimed with shock, but she quickly calmed down. “Another life from a demon’s poisonous tongue.”

However, Ogras noticed that the Beast Master was not as calm as she let on, and he decided to twist the knife a bit.

“Believe what you will. Would I bother lying about something like this? The news will sooner or later spread across the whole Sector, and the natives will bring back news over the coming years. You’ll see. Silly girl, you stayed on this little planet for its opportunities, but you let it all slip through your fingers,” Ogras laughed as he flashed away, effortlessly avoiding an infuriated swipe by Verana.

He appeared right at the exit of the garden and looked back at Verana who stood rooted in place with a stormy expression. One of them looked physically ill and the other looking like he had just won the lottery.

“What were you doing?” Zac asked when Ogras appeared by his side again.

“Rubbing some salt in the wound,” the demon snickered. “Never forget to kick your enemies when they are down.”

“What do you think they’ll do?” Zac asked, ignoring the comment.

“The potential value of a trade route like this is too valuable to simply give up,” Ogras slowly said. “They will definitely leave at least some people here. Not that I think that they can simply leave as they want through someone else’s Incursion. There should be a massive cost to that. I didn’t even know it was possible. At best the girl and a few of her elites will be able to escape this planet, leaving the rest behind. Doesn’t really matter now, does it? You have gained many superior allies since we met these bastards.”

Zac nodded in agreement. If things fell through with the Tir’Emarel clan, then there would be a hundred stronger factions that would probably be more than willing to trade with him after the System’s shroud was lifted. Provided he didn’t become a pariah of the Sector, of course.

The Tal-Eladar kept a wide berth around them as they walked through the town, and they soon reached the Teleportation Array. They appeared in Port Atwood a bout of darkness later, and the two let out a collective sigh of relief. He had seen the others step through just fine, but almost getting ripped to shreds while stuck mid-teleportation had left a small seed of fear in Zac’s heart.

He just wanted to run home and sleep, but there was one thing that couldn’t wait.

“You want to see your girlfriend?” Zac asked after having nodded at the soldiers standing guard at the teleportation tree.

“What? Who?” Ogras blurted and took a step back.

“Emma MacHale,” Zac snorted.

“Oh, her?” Ogras muttered. “What a waste. Why are you seeing her for?”

"I need to speak with Julia," Zac explained. "I want information from the New World Government."

"Why not just go over and cut off a couple of heads before demanding answers? The amount they had badmouthed you would have gotten them all killed long ago on my home planet," Ogras asked.

"I might disband them, or I might not," Zac shrugged. "I haven't decided yet. There should be quite a few turncoats who are willing to offer up intelligence though, so I'll have Julia work a bit in the meantime."

The two soon found themselves at the sprawling mansion that Emma had demanded as remuneration for getting 'kidnapped'. They found the two sitting outside, with Emma reading some scripts while Julia cultivated.

"What are the two of you doing here?" Emma said with a raised brow. "Questions about same-sex relationships? The two of you finally tying the knot?"

"That bore wouldn't be able to land me in a thousand years," Ogras laughed as he snatched the bottle of wine next to Emma. "He's here for your little lover."

"What's going on?" Julia said as she opened her eyes.

"Are you interested in some work?" Zac asked as he looked down at the former government official.

It turned out that the answer was a resounding yes, and Julia almost ran out of the mansion before Zac had explained the situation in full. Staying still for months on end on an isolated island was clearly fraying her nerves.

They eventually decided that Julia would go to Westfort, bringing two bodyguards with her upon Emma's insistence. As for her next step, that would depend on what she found out in the town. She seemed to have the matter in hand, so Zac left after giving her a deadline of a week. If she couldn't find out anything by then he would have to take some more drastic measures.

Zac and Ogras left soon after, and Zac started walking toward his private area.

"What will you do next?" Ogras asked.

"I need to recuperate," Zac sighed. "Cracking open a node caused more trouble than expected. It's really a pain to be a mortal."

"Yes, you're one unlucky bastard," Ogras muttered, his voice dripping with sarcasm as he flashed away.

Zac made his way back to his compound and found that his sister had left a note. She had left for Mystic Island by teleporting to the closest island. The teleporter on Mystic Island itself was apparently blocked by spatial turbulence, probably due to whatever the cultists did to close the tunnel.

Since there was nothing else to do he finally let himself rest for a bit, and he drifted off before his head even touched the pillow. He only woke a full six hours later, feeling a lot better compared to before.

Seeing that no one was looking for him he took the opportunity to start redrawing his pathways again. A map of the extremely intricate lines had thankfully been imprinted in his mind when he evolved, so

there was no guesswork involved. However, the process was anything but simple just because he knew how things were supposed to look.

He slowly carved the extremely thin pathways with the help of his Cosmic Energy, but he was repeatedly forced to stop and redraw the lines. The slightest deviation would ruin everything, and he kept slipping up, forcing him to start over. Minutes turned to hours, but when he finally paused he realized that he had just redrawn a centimeter's length, even though it felt like kilometers of interwoven lines.

This was going to be a lot of work.