

The Fall 546

Chapter 546: Massacre

Zac looked on with both awe and horror at the carnage that was taking place in the distance. The Anointed were simply terrifying when working together, and Zac doubted that any local faction apart from his own would be able to survive their assault. He suddenly felt a presence to his side though, and he looked over to a neighboring tree as he drew his axe.

"Hey," Thea said as she landed.

"Was I that easy to spot?" Zac grimaced as he put [Verun's Bite] away.

"Well, I knew the jammer would be placed in this area, and that you would spectate. It was only a matter of time," Thea said as she turned back to the battlefield. "It's a massacre."

There were no two ways about it. The Zhix Crusaders were obviously not interested in taking prisoners or holding any trials to find the true culprits. Everyone in the hive received the same treatment; a swift death.

Only ten minutes had passed since the battle started but less than 1% of the defending warriors remained. They were fighting desperately to prolong the inevitable, and Zac knew they fought for their honor, to prove their strength to their ancestors before they joined their ranks in the afterlife.

"A lot of them seems to have entered the hive, killing the civilians as well," Thea added after a brief pause.

"I know," Zac nodded.

"You could stop them. They would back down if you demanded it," she said.

"I think you underestimate the importance the Zhix put on this war. It's the very core of their society. Me telling them to stop would probably just give them two targets to fight rather than one," Zac said, and he added after some hesitation. "But I have no intention of finding out."

"How are we any different than our enemies if we go down this path?" Thea said as she turned to Zac.

There was no anger simmering in her eyes, nor was there reproach. There was only an almost disturbing tranquility.

"Who's to say we're any different?" Zac sighed. "We're just rival factions fighting in the mud. They must die so that we can live. We're not the good guys, and they aren't really the bad guys. At least not most of them. We just have opposing interests."

"Hmm," Thea only said, not commenting any further.

The silence stretched on, and Zac felt more and more suffocated as he looked at the increasingly silent mountain in the distance. Should he do something? Millions of lives would be extinguished just so that he could be sure that no karmic threats were lurking on Earth. How could he be so calm while enabling a genocide?

"Someone's running," Thea suddenly said, and Zac saw what she was talking about.

A hidden door had appeared just a few hundred meters away from their location, and a group of Zhix was hurrying out through it. It looked to be mostly elders and clergymen, but they were guarded by a squad of elites. It was probably the leaders of the hive, the mouthpieces of the true Dominators. They were the true target, at least for Zac, and if these people managed to flee then the crusade would lose most of its meaning.

The hidden exit was extremely far from the Hive itself, and there was no way that their actions could be spotted by the Anointed. The squad of scouts wouldn't be able to stop these guys either, even if they put their lives on the line.

"I'll deal with it," Zac said and immediately flashed away, each step taking him dozens of meters through the forest.

He appeared in front of the group of Zhix just a few seconds later, prompting the group to stop in their tracks. They first looked horrified upon being intercepted, but they soon breathed out in relief when they saw it wasn't an Anointed waiting for him, but rather a human.

"A human?!" one of the elders exclaimed as he took two steps forward. "Did your government send you? Hurry, help us get away from here. Our master is Void Disciple, and we have a working cooperation with your kind. You will be rich!"

The old Zhix didn't get any further. His body froze for an instant before it fell apart as blood spurted in every direction. A blue wave spread out the next moment, reaping the lives of more than half of the remaining escapees. Only those lucky enough to stand far away survived the attack that seemingly came out of nowhere.

It was Thea who had arrived as well, weaving a tapestry of death all around her. A few of the guards shot toward her with reckless abandon, releasing a terrifying killing intent. They all seemed to have the same class as well, some sort of earthen warrior. Stones grew to cover their whole bodies, and they quickly grew into 3-meter golems with sharp spikes for arms.

Was this perhaps something devised to counter the towering Anointed?

Carrying around a ton of rock on their bodies did nothing to slow them down, and they tried to stab Thea from every direction. However, their rocky exterior was like paper in front of her, and each swing of her new weapon reaped a life. She weaved through the insectoids like a dancer, each of her strikes both beautiful and deadly.

Zac first felt her swordsmanship felt a bit ostentatious, but he soon realized there was meaning behind every movement. Just slightly repositioning her shoulder or lifting her weapon a few degrees caused changes in the battlefield as the warriors instinctively responded. It was like she was a puppeteer who magically created openings in her opponents to deliver instant death.

The battle was over in less than thirty seconds, with Zac only killing two unlucky fellows who ran straight at him in their attempts to flee from Thea. The Marshall scion had done the rest, and her breath wasn't even labored even though Zac knew she wasn't in perfect condition at the moment. She looked over at Zac with a small smile, before she shook her head and walked over.

"I've told you already, stupid. You're not alone in wanting to protect Earth," she said as she swung her sword in the air, causing all blood on it to fly off its edge. "You don't have to carry this burden alone."

Two Zhix scouts appeared the next moment ready for battle, but they froze when they saw the carnage. Zac briefly explained the situation, and one of them set off to fetch a regiment that could explore the escape tunnel. Zac and Thea walked back to the spot where the jammer was placed, and they found Triv nervously flitting back and forth until he spotted Zac.

The war was still raging, but there were no more breakouts it seemed. Zac wordlessly watched as the last of the insurgent Zhix fell, his mind repeating Thea's words over and over. It helped him with his confusion a bit, but it was impossible to completely shrug off the weight of sin he had amassed today.

The four just needed to wait for another 20 minutes before one of the scouts returned to their hiding spot.

"It is done, Warmaster. You can release the lock," the scout said. "The Anointed asked for you."

"We'll be there in a minute," Zac nodded as he started to take out the Miasma Crystals from the array as Triv returned to his pagoda.

The group flew over to the fallen hive a second later, and they were shocked by the sight even if they had witnessed everything from a distance. It looked like the lone mountain was crying as streams of blood covered its slopes. The smell was even worse, and Thea visibly paled before she bent over and puked.

Even Zac felt nauseated by the intense stench of death as he landed the leaf. There were thankfully almost no corpses around though, but an enormous pyre was already burning some distance from the hive. Between the small mountain of corpses and how the world had been painted in blood, it really felt like they had entered the depths of hell.

Zac once more felt his conviction waver as he looked around. It felt like this whole mountain had become cursed from what had transpired. Ominous energies swirled around the mountain, visible only to his [Cosmic Gaze]. This was something that couldn't be created by a normal war as far as he could tell, but rather a mass genocide of an entire population.

"Warmaster," a bloodied Rhubat said as he walked over. "The purification is complete. The next target awaits."

"Alright," Zac sighed, forcibly pushing down all the confusion and hesitation. "Where to?"

"Come with us first," Rhubat said as he activated the teleporter and walked inside.

At least 90% of the Anointed followed Rhubat, but only a small part of the ordinary soldiers entered as well. It was around ten thousand normal warriors, all of them emitting a bloody aura. Zac guessed it was the captains and sergeants of the army, and he soon followed inside as well with Thea and Ibtep.

They found themselves in another subterranean chamber the next moment, and Zac's eyes widened when there was yet another identical army already waiting. Its size was even larger than the last one, probably approaching half a million warriors.

“We hope to be able to strike at least three hives before they realize what’s going on,” Rhubat said. “After that, we will join our forces as we expect them to do the same. The next town is Gothenburg.”

Zac nodded in understanding and turned to Thea who activated the Teleporter once more.

The same scene repeated itself as the vanguard stepped through the teleporter. Thea stayed behind as Zac set off with the advance scouts, and he looked around with marvel as they flew across the desolate landscape.

Roughly a year had passed since the integration, which meant that summer should be approaching once more. However, you wouldn’t get that feeling at all in the northern reaches of Pangea where the Scandinavian Cultivators had banded together and formed Asgard, an independent force allied to the Marshall Clan.

It was Zac’s first time this far out on the reaches of the massive continent. He had generally traveled within the heartlands where most humans and incursions ended up, or to the southeast where the Dead Zone was located. This area didn’t look like the old Scandinavia though, but it would be more apt to say they had appeared on the Arctic Circle.

Thick layers of ice and snow had turned the world white, but that actually didn’t mean that it was lifeless. He saw towering trees braving the extreme weather, seemingly unbothered by the permafrost. A massive pack of wolves consisting of thousands of hunters passed by beneath them as well, proving there was ample prey available as well.

It was the magical effect of Cosmic Energy. Zac guessed the temperature was minus 30 degrees or so, but he only felt a bit chilly in his normal robes. It would have to become a lot colder than this for him to be affected at all, so it was no wonder that beasts could deal with it just fine. There were probably a lot of humans who succumbed to the harsh environment at the beginning of the integration though.

They soon found their spot close to the hive and set up the Jamming array hidden by a mountain of ice. The same scene of carnage repeated itself an hour later. The snow-covered Hive had turned completely red as the merciless Zhix army slaughtered all the citizens of the Hive. Zac started to feel numb to the carnage, but he still felt hollow inside as he gazed at the puddles of blood that had turned to ice all over the mountain.

The slaughter continued from there, but something suddenly changed when the army arrived at the fifth hive. This time a full million Zhix marched across the wasteland, and Zac felt horrified at the amount of Nexus Coins the Zhix had spent to move around the armies like this. A war of this scale was probably only possible thanks to the wealth that the Zhix had gained from fighting the zombies over the past months.

The last four assaults were essentially one-sided slaughters, but it looked like the Dominators were finally responding in kind. There was barely any free ground around the insurgent hive as hundreds of thousands of warriors stood at the ready.

There were also massive towers that had been erected at the perimeter, seemingly a last-minute purchase from the Town Shop. They all radiated power, and Zac knew that there would be noticeable casualties to push past that line of defense. He even asked if they wanted him to act as a wall-breaker, but the Zhix War Council actually rejected it.

He could only shake his head in bemusement as he looked on, but he was relieved to see that the Zhix weren't completely incapable of resisting the fiery barrages that the towers launched. Those enormous seals that the Anointed summoned seemed to be a natural War Array of some kind, and the Zhix warriors infused it with power to create a sturdy shield that protected them from attacks coming from above.

However, the Array Towers was only the first counter that the defenders had prepared for them.

Hidden pathways suddenly opened up behind the Anointed army and warriors flooded out of them. The War Council suddenly found themselves pincered as they dealt with the barriers and Array Towers to the Front, and an all-out assault from the rear. Worse yet, almost all of the Anointed were at the other side of the army acting as a vanguard, so the elite Zhix among the Dominators faced little resistance as they pushed into the rearguard.

Worry gripped Zac's heart as he looked at the scene, and he decisively started walking toward the army with a ruthless gleam. He had happily stayed out of the war until now as some sort of coping mechanism, but he couldn't allow this to go on. Their losses would be too big if he didn't turn things around.

"Are you really doing this? After standing back so long?" Thea asked from behind, and Zac only nodded in response.

However, he only managed to take a few steps before his mind screamed of danger. He immediately tried to flash away, but he was shocked to find himself rooted in place as the whole world rapidly slowed to a crawl. One possibility immediately entered his mind.

Had the true Dominators finally made their appearance?