

## The Fall 846

### Chapter 846: Unordinary Luck

There were a few people that Zac needed to talk with now that he was back from Ensolus, but he only hesitated for a second before making his way toward the commercial district. For years, he had been holding onto his fortune, wondering exactly what it was worth. Not only that, but there were thousands of items in his rings that he couldn't identify, and the curiosity had kept him up some nights in the Orom World.

Finally, he was back, and any further governance could wait now that he had dealt with Ensolus. He wanted to get his treasure trove identified and appraised.

Still, Zac wasn't in a hurry, so he leisurely walked down the streets, enjoying the fresh air and the sights. A lot of people were wandering about, yet it didn't feel cramped at all with no vehicles plugging up the street. With spatial tools, there was no need for any trucks to move items. And with the citizens of Port Atwood mostly being talented cultivators and their families, people could move faster by simply walking than taking a car.

There were, however, a few people riding on mounts, and Zac was a bit surprised to see spot a grizzled man ride on an armored Barghest that was even larger than the six-legged Alpha he killed way back when. Luckily, it didn't emit any of the bestial bloodthirst the Barghest were known for, and there was even a hint of intelligence in its eyes. It looked like the Tal-Eladar had imparted some of their skills over the past years.

Over an hour passed as Zac got reacquainted with his town, his identity hidden within his hood. With its powerful inscriptions, Zac could essentially walk right next to people without them noticing, allowing him to catch glimpses of the daily lives of his citizens. But eventually, he reached his destination, and he passed through the opulent gates to the Thayer Consortia Compound.

The store, whose size had increased over tenfold since his last visit, didn't contain the slightest hint of its wretched state of ten years ago. Back then, some of the dilapidated buildings didn't even have roofs, but now there were more than a dozen grand structures in what had essentially turned into a district unto itself.

Apart from multiple department-store-sized buildings, there were also huge training yards where customers could test out items, and Zac smiled as he saw a bunch of kids playing around. They were probably pre-cultivating students of the academy, and one of them was arduously swinging around a real steel sword while the others laughed at his clumsy performance.

Still, there was something about the youngster's determined expression that resonated with him, and something about those seemingly clumsy swings he appreciated. So Zac took off his hood and flashed over, appearing in front of the kids and a startled attendant in an instant whose eyes turned to saucers when she recognized who he was.

"Not bad," Zac smiled as a Spirit Tool shortsword appeared in his hands, its inscribed blade gleaming with sharpness before he placed it back in its scabbard. "It could be considered fate we met today. This blade might be better suited for you though. Remember; path, skill, technique, and Dao. It is all connected."

The young boy looked part-afraid by Zac's sudden appearance and part-confused over his words. Even then, his hand stretched out to grab the scabbard, a glint of hunger in his eyes. Zac nodded, and a moment later he was gone, having used [Earthstrider] to head into a slightly less conspicuous building on the back – a structure solely for managing the fast-growing Thayer Consortia.

Two receptionists were going over some documents in the lobby, but they shot to their feet when Zac suddenly appeared out of nowhere. A moment later, he was led to an enormous office on the top floor where the attendants bowed and took their leave. Inside were both Calrin, who had gotten slightly plumper since Zac saw him last, along with Vikram, whose aura had become a lot more refined.

The young genius Zac was wearing a pair of glasses that Zac could tell were some sort of Spirit Tool, as were the ledger in his hands. Working at the top of a License-holding business must have been extremely conducive to his Mercantile class, and it looked like he had perfectly adapted his old skillset to the new environment.

"Young master," the little Sky Gnome said with glee as Zac entered the offices. "When I heard the young Lord Atwood had returned safe and sound, I cried three days and two nights straight from relief, while the Thayer Children danced and sang praises to the Heavens, who truly-"

"Alright, alright," Zac snorted before the merchant started parading those puppy-eyed gnomelings in front of him again. "What's going on?"

"He's hoping for you to deal with his problems again," Vikram shrugged.

"You!" Calrin exclaimed as he gave Vikram a death stare. "Cretinous wretch! For years you have harassed me-"

"Stopped you from embezzling funds."

"Harassed me," the Sky Gnome repeated. "Clipped my wings, stopping us from reaching our full potential-"

"Bankruptcy," Vikram interjected once again.

"...And yet I imparted my knowledge of business unto you," Calrin huffed.

"Tried to scam me," Vikram sighed.

"And this is the thanks I get?"

"What problems? What have you done?" Zac asked, happy to hear his outside hire was performing splendidly in curtailing the seemingly inherent shiftiness among the gnomes.

"I assure you, I have furthered your interest faithfully," Calrin said with eyes glimmering of fake sincerity fraught with suffering. "But as you must have heard by now, the upcoming war has caused chaos in the mercantile sector. Our Thayer Consortia is finding itself hard-pressed to turn a profit, at least not with the rules you set before leaving."

Zac slowly understood what Calrin was getting at. After the situation on earth had stabilized, Zac had set some ground rules for his budding business empire. At that time, he was yet not a majority shareholder,

but he was still the Lord of Earth. Seeing how he was essentially setting up a monopoly on the market, apart from the limited businesses run by the Marshall Clan, Calrin had pretty much unlimited power.

If he wanted, the Sky Gnome could essentially have set any prices he wanted for items not carried in the General Stores, siphoning the riches of the whole planet. With Smaug gone and Zac having dominated the wealth ladder, there was no one else holding Mercantile Licenses at the moment. Not even the Marshalls had managed to get their hands on one, and they still weren't even close according to the missives.

Zac wasn't surprised. If it was so easy to get one, then the Tsarun Clan wouldn't have needed to target the Thayer Consortia. You needed to be a true talent in business and accomplish rare feats to even get the quest chains started. From there, you needed to get at least an A-grade evaluation to get a Temporary License. To make it permanent, even more trials and tribulations waited.

So since his business essentially was without any competition, Zac had set up some hard limits on pricing to balance profit and allowing Earth's warriors to keep progressing. But even then, how could the gnome have run into trouble in a couple of years with his massive cash infusion?

"Even if prices have gone up, shouldn't we be doing fine?" Zac asked.

"Well, we are still turning a profit, but not nearly as much as we should," Calrin grimaced. "We are also finding it harder and harder to fill the purchase orders of your subordinates. Our old enemies have taken the opportunity to strike back at us now that the situation has turned unstable."

"And you expanded to aggressively in a changing market," Vikram added. "Getting us even more enemies."

"Hush, you," Calrin waved. "Without some aggression, we would just get boxed in."

"What enemies?" Zac asked. "Is it related to Tsarun?"

"Partly," Calrin said. "Two large businesses are working against us, locking us out from most of the supply lines, affecting both our ability to import and export. On top of that, there are some smaller ventures like our own consortia who are trying to seize our markets now that we're being pressured. Part of the issues unsurprisingly originates with the Tsarun Clan, while the other large corporation is targeting us due to our... ahem... array-improving business."

Zac inwardly groaned, realizing the chicken had come home to roost from Kenzie's extortionist business.

"I don't understand how two companies can cause us so much trouble," Zac frowned. "Why can't you just trade through that license of yours?"

"All intra-sector trade through a Mercantile License is under the purview of the Zecia Mercantile Guild, which is controlled by the largest mercantile organizations and clans," Vikram explained. "The System is uninterested in the details, so it pawns off that responsibility to the ones who have the qualifications and are willing to pay the fees."

"Their licenses are far more advanced than the basic ones we use," Calrin added with envy written all over his face. "With them, they can control a lot of things. They can even ban certain products and

impose tariffs. Currently, there are nine clans at the top, and two of them are actively working against us.”

“Who?” Zac asked with a frown.

“The Starlode Ventures, who have close relationships with the Tsarun clan. A lot of the Tsarun-clan’s business is going through them, and they are suspected to even trade with the Undead Empire and unorthodox cultivators,” Calrin said. “The Second is the Draol Munitions, who have a close alliance with many of the Inscriptionists your sister, ah, consulted. The latter is especially troublesome now since they are one of the two biggest suppliers of expendable wartime items such as talismans, arrays, and offensive and defensive treasures.”

Zac somewhat knew of the two ventures, but not much more than that. He knew Draol Munitions had a store at the heart of the Base Town, but it was kind of exclusive like the Zethaya Pill House. As for Starlode Ventures, Zac had visited more than one of their auction houses across Zecia when procuring items for his sister and Jeeves.

“What about the other seven?” Zac frowned. “Will the others just look the other way when they harass smaller ventures?”

“Crushing the smaller competition by abusing their superior licenses is common practice, I’m sure all of them are doing it to one poor sap or another,” Calrin shrugged. “Why would the others intercede on our behalf? Even if they were so inclined, they aren’t interested in rocking the boat now that the sector is about to be plunged into chaos. Everyone is scrambling to make money while our shelves are half-empty and we’re taking a loss on much of what remains.”

“Still, even if they can cut you off from some resources, they can’t completely isolate us, right?” Zac asked with confusion. “Shouldn’t we be making a lot of money on exports even if we can’t import the items we want?”

“What exports?” Calrin snorted. “This is just a single miniature planet that’s mostly wilderness. How can our production amount to anything in the grand scheme of things? More importantly, we barely have any craftsmen, and it’s the refined items that are truly in demand right now. Talismans, equipment, arrays. Things you earthlings want me to procure without providing anything I can sell in return.”

“Well, there’s not much we can do about the craftsmen, except to keep providing our talents with resources to gain experience,” Zac shrugged. “So what do you want from me?”

His company being pushed into a corner by some big businesses was a somewhat thorny issue, but not something would lose sleep over. He’d help if he could, but he wouldn’t break his back to increase the profit margins of the Thayer Consortia. After all, he had already gathered more resources than he could possibly need for the next century.

“Well, you have the unique ability to travel the sector,” the Sky Gnome said with a crafty grin. “If we can buy resources directly from the source, we can directly circumvent those bastards.”

“You want me to become a porter for you?” Zac laughed. “I don’t have time for that. But you know, I think I can do you one better if you’re lacking resources.”

“What’s this? More items lifted from your enemies?” Calrin asked curiously as Zac threw over a couple of his Spatial Rings. “Not to worry, we’ll deal with any eventual diffi... culties...”

Calrin’s greedy gleam quickly transformed into a hollow stare, and his small hands started to shake as they grasped the Spatial Ring.

“What... This...” the gnome sputtered, prompting Vikram to look over with curiosity. The young industrialist picked up another one of the rings to scan its contents, and he instantly lost the staid expression he’d maintained since Zac’s arrival.

“Like you said, just some items I lifted from my enemies,” Zac smiled.

Altogether, Zac had looted far more spatial treasures than the few he threw over – hundreds of them. However, most of them weren’t too impressive since they were lifted from the E-grade adventurers in the Twilight Ocean. All that mediocre loot barely filled one of his bulk item-rings, with the rest coming from bulk purchases in the Orom World and Twilight Harbor, along with the Hegemon-owned rings he looted in the Void.

“This not good,” Calrin eventually said as he closed his eyes and leaned back into his chair. “Not good at all.”

“What?” Zac frowned. “These items weren’t even looted in the Zecia sector. It can’t be too difficult to pawn them off. And if the problem is volume, I have dozens of these rings.”

“Please stop,” Calrin groaned as his shoulders drooped. “I can’t take it.”

“What’s the matter with you?” Zac said with a raised brow. “Since when were you allergic to treasure?”

“You’re going to give me a Heart Demon,” the gnome choked, and there were actually tears forming in the corner of his eyes. “I work myself ragged day after day, going over quotes and reports until I see numbers dancing across the walls. But I barely manage to make a few D-grade Nexus Coins in profit while you return with treasures worth millions.”

“Well, so sorry about that,” Zac said, his voice laden with sarcasm.

“I should have become a warrior. A brute,” Calrin muttered, not listening to Zac any longer. “No need to worry about projections, no need to keep constant watch over my thieving employees. Just swing my axe and drown in wealth.”

“It’s not like these things come easy. I shouldn’t even be alive,” Zac snorted. “You know where I got these things? A Divine Monarch fought with an Autarch, and the shockwaves ripped the capital of a C-grade force to shreds. Trillions died, probably. I picked these things off the bodies of Hegemons who had been killed by errant blasts, narrowly avoiding getting blasted myself.”

“Ah?” Calrin said, his eyes glazing over. “Hegemons ripped to shreds?”

“Then I got captured by a monstrous beast that ate Monarchs like candy,” Zac added.

“That’s...” Calrin said as he glanced at the rings again. “Perhaps, the slowly and steady path is the best, after all.”

“Perhaps you’re right,” Zac said with a roll of his eyes. “And going from thatched roofs to annual revenue counted in D-grade coins can’t possibly be considered bad.”

“That’s right,” Calrin puffed his chest. “Even with the winds blowing against us, good ol’ Calrin is bringing in the profits. So this loot, what do you want to do with it?”

“I have already made a preliminary sweep and put aside the best things,” Zac said. “For the rest, same as usual. The good stuff goes to the contribution store, the decent to the shops, and the trash can be pawned off elsewhere. Hopefully, you can make some alliances with all those things, get yourself out of your current predicament. Oh, but keep any strategic war resources aside until we know what we’ll be dealing with down the road. And if you find something interesting in the rings, put it aside as well. I might have missed some good things.”

“Certainly,” Calrin said.

“I’ll keep the thievery to a minimum, but I only have so many eyes,” Vikram sighed.

“You! Evil thing!” Calrin spat.

“On another topic,” Zac said, ignoring the two who almost seemed like an old married couple. “I need the latest information on the Void Gate and Salosar.”

Void Gate was the key to getting his hands on the Ferric Worldeater for his quest to upgrade the Shipyard, and Salosar was the closest place he had access to thanks to completing the System’s training regimen in the research base. It could be considered a border town that was either neutral or a subsidiary planet to the Void Gate.

It was a mercantile hub that provided the reclusive faction with cultivation resources, while the gate used Salosar to pawn off some materials that only appeared inside their domain.

“No need,” Calrin said. “I already have it.”

“Oh?” Zac said with surprise.

“I’ve been keeping some tabs on them since you asked me all those years ago,” Calrin said. “And with the recent changes, I’ve been updating my reports weekly.”

“Changes? What’s going on” Zac asked curiously.

“Apparently, they are having problems with some sort of beast tide?” Calrin hesitated. “And they have sent out calls for assistance.”

Zac’s brows rose in surprise over this unexpected turn. He had wondered whether he would need to expose his identity to gain access to the Void Star where the Ferric Worldeaters could be found, something which would bring some real risks with a powerful faction like the Void Gate. But just as he was wondering what to do, a solution had presented itself.

He had to admit – being blessed by unordinary Luck was quite convenient.