

The Fall 259

Chapter 259: Insurrection

Thea looked at the hopeless situation in front of her with a frown, her hand frozen by indecision.

"It's just a game, dear. No need for such consternation," her opponent smiled from the opposite side of the table as Thea reluctantly moved a piece.

She didn't know what was more vexing; being stuck as an unwilling pawn in the machinations of the crown prince in front of her, or that she was miserably losing in a game of chess. Vasidas had found her board game after his father looted her Cosmos Sack, and had immediately been taken with the seemingly simple game.

Of course, the former predicament was far worse in reality. She had truly and utterly overestimated herself. After the mishap with Zac she had kept her head down, and looted summit after summit for two whole weeks. But no matter what she did she had been unable to get ahead in the ladder, and unlooted mountains were becoming almost impossible to find.

Thea knew that without risking one's life one couldn't hope to get ahead in this new cut-throat world, so she had enacted a daring plan. She would snatch the Cosmos Sack of one of the four E-Grade powerhouses apart from the two Dominators.

She already knew that apart from Emperor Nenotheop the others were in the earliest stages of the E-grade, far weaker than the monstrous Insectoid who had almost claimed her life earlier. She believed that between planning and her specific skill-set she would be able to steal the pouch and escape without them being able to stop her.

If worse came to worst she would simply activate her ultimate escape skill once again. Losing a few levels in exchange for the accumulated wealth of one of the E-Grade powerhouses was a worthy trade. The levels could be gained back within a month, but the wealth of a fallen sect could help her and her family for decades.

But she had been naïve. She had followed Vasidas for three days, using every skill and lesson she had learned to hide from him. It was all for one specific moment. When the prince entered a summit array he completely froze due to the protective array, and Thea had exploded into action.

But the rest was only a blur. The next moment Thea remembered was when she stood in front of the smiling prince devoid of her trial-token or an ounce of Cosmic Energy. It turned out he had been aware of her presence since the start and had only played along to see what her plan was.

"Come now, you have been brooding since we decided to work together," Vasidas said with a smile as he poured Thea a cup of tea. "Have I not been an accommodating host?"

"You did not leave me a much of a choice," Thea muttered, though she had to admit what he said was true.

He had been a true gentleman in every sense of the word, but her instincts screamed of danger every time she saw his congenial smile. That was especially true since she knew she was a key piece in Vasidas' master plan. She had learned a bit of it from their time together so far, and his ruthlessness truly made

her blood run cold. He had even somehow manipulated Ylvas Berum into a desperate struggle where Vasidas' own brother died.

And now he had orchestrated an even more desperate battle.

"Come now. I have no interest in the lives of you or Mr. Atwood, as I have explained. I don't care about this little hunt at all, for that matter. It's just some levels and a Limited Title. If it didn't provide me with the opportunity to play my games I wouldn't have joined in," Vasidas said as he gripped one of his bishops.

"The treasures aren't bad compared to my homeworld, I guess. But it's just useless baubles compared to what The Great Lord will provide for his personal disciple," the prince continued. "And as long as you and Mr. Atwood play my game we can be seen as allies rather than enemies. Checkmate."

A shiver ran down Thea's spine as she saw Vasidas pick up her king and crush it into dust with a vicious gleam in his eyes. She truly didn't know whether she wished for Zac to come or stay far away from this summit.

Zac, Billy, and the first company were moving toward the group of mountains the Medhin Army occupied. The optimal plan would be to dismantle all four surrounding mountain defenses before hitting the main mountain in the middle. That way they would avoid any risk of being pincerred from behind. Unfortunately, they did not have the manpower for that, so they needed to adopt a riskier approach.

The current plan was to quickly destroy the western mountain with their whole army, and then immediately hit the main peak. A part of their forces would impede any potential backup from the other three mountains surrounding the main mountain, but the main force would move as a spear straight toward the Emperor. That way their backs would at least be clear for a while, allowing them to focus only on the enemies in front of them.

But that didn't mean it would be an easy battle. All the remaining royals and the strongest soldiers were stationed there, and everyone present knew that just ascending the mountain might cost them their lives. But everyone here was a soldier intent on liberating their world, and their eyes were filled with determination.

Zac and Billy were in the middle of the squad, and they were hidden in large cloaks. Billy was even hunched over to somewhat hide his massive frame. It had taken some time for Zac and Ylvas, but they had finally managed to explain the plan so that Billy understood it.

Billy would be a wall-breaker of sorts. If the defending armies on the main peak erected a strong defense he would do his best to destroy or at least weaken it. Zac's job was to weaken the enemy side as much as possible in ten seconds after saving Thea. After that he had to join Ylvas in the battle against Nenotheop. A caveat was that if Vasidas joined his father they would unhesitantly flee.

With the help of communication crystals all four of the forces arrived around the targeted mountain within a few minutes of each other. Zac couldn't see the leaders of the other three squads, but Ylvas had already told them that each was led by a powerhouse who was close to the bottleneck.

"You two stay here with the reserve force. We do not want you within eyesight of their scouts or spies. We have already ascertained that physical line of sight is needed to check someone's ladder position.

Billy is okay since his ladder position is far lower than his actual strength. But try to stay out of sight as much as possible,” Ylvas said to Zac.

Zac only nodded and indicated for Billy to stay with him.

“We are not going with Alien-man?” Billy asked with some confusion.

“There are some bad guys up there, but Thea is not on this mountain. We will rest for now. We are the special weapon, so we can’t let the bad guys know about us,” Zac explained as he looked at the forces streaming up the mountain.

It didn’t take long for the whole mountain to erupt in furious fighting. It was clear, however, that the defending forces couldn’t match the Berum onslaught. The battles were steadily moving toward the summit, and soon they took place on the top of the mountain, obscuring Zac’s vision.

A few thundering echoes erupted on the summit, and not long after the sounds of battle subsided. Zac saw that a few hundred men started streaming down toward their position. From the energy contained in those echoes up at the top of the mountain, it seemed like the ancillary mountains were only manned by regular soldiers and a few stronger people to maintain order.

There was no rest when the warriors had descended the mountain, and they cut straight toward the main peak. A few people had died and even more were wounded, but they simply popped a healing pill and restored their energy with a Nexus Crystal as they moved.

Soon they arrived at the foot of the mountain that Nenotheop Medhin occupied, and two squads veered off to impede any enemy forces coming for backup. But the main army consisting of roughly 200 cultivators pushed toward the summit as one.

Their force was lead by Ylvas and his three generals. One was a young man with a slightly feminine face who held a staff in both his hands. The second was a huge woman that Zac almost thought was a smaller female version of Billy. She sported an enormous two-handed sword on her back, and her arms bulged with huge muscles. The final general looked positively ancient, but he had no problems keeping up with the others as it almost looked like he floated.

They started ascending the mountain but there surprisingly were no signs of any resistance, with not even a single stationed to impede their approach. In fact, it looked like all the structures and obscuring features of the mountain had been demolished, giving everyone a clear line of sight toward the summit.

Zac couldn’t help but get a bad feeling as he slowly walked up the mountain paths with the others, and he wasn’t alone. Their progression had slowed to a crawl as the scouts in the front kept swiveling their heads back and forth in search of any traps waiting for them.

But it was instead a rumble that shook the whole mountain that warned them that the Medhin counterattack was incoming. Torrential amounts of flames were suddenly pouring down from the summit, making the mountain look like an erupting volcano.

However, Zac immediately sensed that the fire was conjured rather than a natural occurrence. Likely it was some sort of slaughter array or combination attack from the Medhin soldiers. Still, the intensity of the incoming fire wasn’t anything to scoff at, and Zac hesitantly glanced at Ylvas.

While Zac would be able to protect himself, and Billy if needed, from the onslaught he wasn't so sure about the rest of the soldiers. But while Ylvas had a grim face he didn't seem overly worried.

"Defend!" he shouted, and all soldiers took out identical spheres and started to pump them full of Cosmic Energy, as the ancient man took out a far larger copy of the same item.

The huge sphere floated up in the air above the old general, and the smaller orbs were clearly imbuing it with energy, making it quickly grow to cover their whole army. Only seconds later the roiling flames slammed into the shield, but it held steady.

However, the force of the flames was clearly having an impact, and blood was streaming down the nose of the old man.

"We need to speed up. Lord Rhuvim can't keep the shield going for long!" Ylvas shouted and started to push forward.

The huge woman carefully lifted the old man and placed him on her shoulder as she ran, letting him fully focusing on maintaining the barrier. But even though the army ran at a breakneck pace the shield was quickly showing signs of collapse from the intense flames.

Worse yet, after a minute of ascending they weren't only accosted by flames any longer. Huge boulders were tumbling down the mountain, each of them slamming into the mountain with enough force to make the ground shake.

Some of them luckily had veered off course, but every time one of them hit the shield it looked like the old man was physically punched. The onslaught was also having an effect on the army, and many faces were starting to pale from the energy consumption of maintaining the shield.

"I leave the rest to you, little Vas," Rhuvim suddenly said with a wet cough that made blood stream down his robe.

The next moment he flashed forward, ignoring Ylvas' order to wait. His aura was completely unleashed and a hurricane formed around him that soon was over fifty meters wide. Power roiled in the air around the old man, and he pushed straight into the flames.

Zac sighed because he understood what fueled that tremendous burst of power. That old general was burning his remaining life-force in order to create an opening that would let the army ascend. The intense powers in the hurricane threw the incoming boulders far up into the air, harmlessly passing the speeding army by, and even the cascading flames were forced to retreat from his advance.

The general's sacrifice had been enough to allow the Berum resistance force to reach the summit unscathed. The moment they saw the crest the old man simply looked back and smiled before he fell over. Ylvas immediately flashed over and caught the old man, cradling the body with red-rimmed eyes.

Zac mutely stared at the corpse of Rhuvim with a heavy heart. The old man might have not possessed even a fraction of the power compared to the old man in his Dao vision, but he clearly shared the same type of conviction. Zac slightly bowed toward the man as Ylvas put him into his Cosmos Sack before he drew his rapier with a grim expression.

Waiting for them at a top was hundreds of elite soldiers emitting monstrous killing intent. In the front of the soldiers stood a man in a golden robe, holding a three-meter long spear in his right hand. A towering aura was emanating from him, even making his hair flutter in the air.

"So you have come, rebel scum. It is just as well. You will join Repubat for his final journey."