

The Fall 273

Chapter 273: Guarantee Death

Zac's heartbeat sped up in anticipation, and he almost wanted to smack himself when he realized he had forgotten about checking his cultivation talent in his Draugr form. It felt especially likely now that he learned that the Draugr was a royal group that had extra good control over miasma compared to other undead species.

But he forcibly put away the manual again and refocused on his real task. It was not like he could try it out at the moment in any case, since he was currently in his human form. Instead, he kept looking through the documents and crystals that were written in the script of the Undead Empire.

A welcome find was that one of the crystals was actually a skill crystal that taught a miasma-based attack. It was unfortunate, but the skills in the repository were unusable in his Draugr-form since Miasma and Cosmic Energy weren't interchangeable.

So the large treasure trove of skills that he possessed was completely useless for his undead form unless there were some undead skills on the higher tiers that he still didn't have access to. That was also why he had been forced to enter the hunt without an offensive skill to complement his Undying Bulwark class.

Unfortunately, it wasn't the skill that the Corpse Lord used where he summoned two fearsome miasmic beasts, but rather something that seemed a bit more mundane. The skill was called [Unholy Strike] and it was a simple skill that allowed one to force a large amount of Miasma into your arms to unleash a mighty strike.

It could either be used on its own to empower one's strike or in conjunction with another skill. For example, he could use it to strike harder with [Verun's Bite] against sturdy enemies. It wouldn't help much against hordes of beasts, but it would actually be even better than [Chop] against stronger foes. Furthermore, if he had been able to use [Chop] in his undead form he would have been able to empower it with [Unholy Strike] for a combined attack.

Zac remembered that Mhal had used it in conjunction with his bone scythe, and the effect had been pretty good. It was a skill that got stronger from physical attributes as well, and it even mentioned that the better the constitution one had, the more miasma one could push into the arms.

And if there was something that he excelled at in his Draugr-form, it was Endurance. Zac quickly put the skill together with the cultivation manual, and he couldn't help but feel eager to swap to his undead form to test his new gains.

But he pushed on through Mhal's notes, and finally his eyes turned to a ragged journal bound in some black leather. He had seen it before lying together with piles of other crystals and books, but he hadn't checked it out before after learning that all the documents in the Corpse Lord's possession were in illegible scripts. He took it out of his sack and looked over it briefly before he made to open it.

"Wait!" someone suddenly shouted, and Zac stopped himself with a start.

It was the old thief-turned-appraiser that looked over in his direction with alarm.

“What’s the matter?” Zac asked with some confusion.

“Do not open that,” Gemidir quickly said as he hurried over. “It has tampering-protections in place. If you open it you will destroy the contents.”

“What?” Zac exclaimed with shock as he quickly moved his hand away from it.

“It’s a common protection in case your things get stolen. Sometimes it’s not the treasures that hold the value of a snatched bag, it’s the information,” the old man said as he nimbly gripped the book. “And when there are protections there are solutions.”

Suddenly a small white rat popped out from nowhere on top of the old man’s hand, and Zac realized it was likely a skill since the mouse was covered in small fractals. But it was extremely lifelike, making Zac believe that the old man might actually be in the E-grade even though he gave off a very feeble vibe.

But suddenly both the old man and the mouse froze, and both looked over at Zac with an odd look.

“What’s wrong? Can’t you open it?” Zac asked with some urgency.

“This old man can’t be sure,” the elderly Sky Gnome said with an exaggerated sigh. “As you know our family has hit hard times lately. My house has been repaired but the wind goes right through, freezing me to my bones. My skills aren’t what they used to be due to that.”

“Uh,” Zac said with some confusion, but some realization dawned upon him when Gemidir kept talking.

“Nothing like those fancy houses I’ve seen you humans build. With your insulation and temperature-control, with all kinds of miraculous appliances that could improve the living situation of a poor old man.”

“I’ll commission a mansion with for you if you can successfully open this thing up without harming the contents,” Zac said with some amusement.

“This old man is honored, but I don’t even have the furniture to fill such an extravagant three-story mansion,” the old man said.

When did I say three-story? Zac thought to himself with some resignation.

“I’ll also provide furniture,” Zac added.

“What abou-“

“Don’t push it,” Zac cut him off. “I am sure there are many others who are willing and able to lift some restrictions.”

“This old man finally realized how to open this thing, rest assured young man,” Gedimir quickly said, and the next moment the mouse jumped up onto the cover of the book, sniffing around.

Zac curiously looked on as the small mouse seemed to be looking for something until it indicated a corner at the top of the book to Gemidir. When the old thief got the signal he channeled some Cosmic Energy into his finger and lightly tapped the spot the mouse found.

The old man gave off the aura of a safecracker as he and his sidekick lifted the restrictions one by one. In total, they found 9 spots at which point Gemidir nodded in affirmation as the mouse disappeared. Zac took the leather-bound book, looking over at the old man with some skepticism.

The book looked exactly the same as before, and Zac honestly couldn't tell if he had just been scammed out of a mansion or whether the old man had been telling the truth. But it was too late to regret anything now, and Zac felt it was better to be safe than sorry.

If Mhal truly was doing some experiments with Draugr-DNA or something similar it was reasonable that he wanted to keep that secret. Doing something like that might draw the ire of the noble clans, getting both himself and his clan into trouble.

The old man nodded at him with a smile before he joined the others as they kept going through treasures under Kenzie's direction. He noted that she had placed a few things in a small pile by herself, and he guessed she had found a few things that she needed.

Zac didn't mind if she took some things for herself. Some might see it as nepotism, but he didn't really care. He was the one who found everything, so he decided how things would be distributed. Instead, he focused on the journal in front of him, and just after a few sentences he was hooked.

Little brother, I am sorry about the secrecy, but some things cannot simply be said out loud. I will explain why I gave you those odd instructions, and I hope that you can create a miracle.

During my travels two hundred years ago I fell through a spatial crack while I explored a mystic realm. I was sure I would perish to the vacuum of space, but instead I found myself in a tomb with a body encased in Eternal Ice. A Draugr warrior. Just digging him out took me three years.

In his possessions were a journal, and I realized that this man had been entombed in this odd space for billions of years. According to the archaic scrips, I quickly realized that this man came from an era from even before the Undying Empire was founded. Can you believe it, an ancestor from the dark era?

He was a lone warrior and had no children or other next of kin, and he had met his demise while traveling to find a way to gain a breakthrough, just like I did. I quickly put the body inside my pouch and after twenty-four years I managed to escape through the very same tear that finally reappeared for a brief window.

At first, I was planning to provide the body to the Mendelosa-clan in hopes of attaining their favor and perhaps some resources. After all, returning an ancestor of their kin should count for something, right?

But then I had an idea. In my possession I had a Draugr specimen in prime condition, and more importantly, the body seemed to have no connection to the current lineages. You know how they can crack down on experiments through threads of Karma, but there shouldn't be any Karma between this man and the current clans, no?

That's when I got the idea for my experiments. Imagine, gaining the superior miasmic aptitude of the Draugr race while still having the great constitution of us Corpse Lords? The moment the thought entered my mind I couldn't let it go.

Unfortunately, it's hard for me to perform such experiments in my current position. There are too many eyes watching my moves since I became patriarch. If I start procuring large numbers of the living and the unevolved to experiment on I fear I might be found out.

That's why I spent so much money to give you this chance. Certainly, the chance to bask in the resources of a virgin world is a great opportunity. But the experiments are more important. You are young, but you have always had a clever mind with your manipulation and augmentation of the lower undead. I ask you to use that insight now.

Enclosed are 1000 small samples from the Draugr body. I hope you can use them to push the research further. I honestly haven't made much progress thus far, and this all might just be a pipe dream. Every subject thus far has failed due to their bodies not being able to withstand rebuilding the core composition.

Get strong test subjects, the longer they survive the more data you will be able to collect. I wish you the best of luck little brother, and I hope you will come back with news that can push the two of us to new heights.

And most importantly, remember to never tell anyone about what we're doing. None of us will survive if it gets out.

The following pages were meticulously kept experimentation logs, where the Corpse Lord recounted various trials where he tried to infuse both undead and the living with the 'Essence of Draug' as he called it. The results were abysmal.

After a while the script slightly changed, telling Zac that Mhal had taken over the experiments at that point, whereas the earlier ones were performed by the elder brother.

The reading was a chilling experience for Zac because it showed just how close to death he had been. Hundreds of zombies and humans had been caught by Mhal and forcibly imbued with the essence, and not one had survived. The strongest had lasted less than a day before dying a true death.

It was due to this that Mhal had even started mentioning using the essence as a poison rather than a medicine, which brought Zac to a short and succinct note in-between two experimentation logs.

Forced to use three stored essence seeds as a weapon in the fight against particularly strong native to guarantee death. Unfortunately unable to retrieve the body for study. Over three hundred samples have been used already, I need to portion out my trials from this point forward.

Zac's eyes lingered on the two words 'guarantee death' for a full minute as he tried to comprehend what had happened. He had been injected with a large dose of the essence, which should have killed him like all others. But not only was he fine after a pretty harrowing experience, but he even got a specialty core and a second race.

What made him different from the hundreds of others that had died from the injections? A possibility that he had avoided until now couldn't help but appear in his mind. Their mother had implanted Kenzie with the AI chip that helped and protected her, but was that all she did?

Had he been experimented on as well?

