

## The Fall 298

### Chapter 298: Rot

Zac was delighted to hear Nonet's proclamation. The Zhix were born warriors and they would be a great help against the endless zombie hordes. The Zombies were a huge problem for forces like Zac's. His soldiers were a lot stronger than the Zombies, but there were simply too many of the undead.

"Did you mention the peace with the Marshall Clan?" Zac asked.

"The humans of this hive have proven to decently strong warriors, and hive Dahiti is amenable to an alliance," Nonet nodded.

"Then you can stay behind here. Bring someone from the Marshall clan with you to the hive next time. The Marshalls know a lot more about the movements of the undead armies, and they can provide good input," Zac said.

With that, it seemed everything was dealt with. The only thing left to do was to prepare for war. Zac also wanted to experiment with his latest gains until they needed to mobilize, so he went to find the others.

Calrin was ready to go as he needed to prepare the business expansion from his end. The Thayer family was already stretching itself a bit thin at the moment, opening over ten branches in just a week. But he was still energized by the thought of the increased revenue streams.

Adran would stay behind for a bit to coordinate the war effort, which only left Emily. After asking around a bit he finally found the teenager with Billy in a lounge area. The two were in the middle of a battle in a fighting game, with around ten children excitedly cheering them on.

"Billy has missed video games!" the giant said as he desperately mashed the buttons of his controller when he saw Zac enter the room.

Zac could only shake his head when he noted the five controllers next to Billy that were all crushed into scrap.

"We have both video games and movies at Port Atwood," Zac said. "We will start to battle the other ratlights in three days. Do you want to help?"

"Billy will come. Billy already misses the ratlight. Gave Billy a lot of money," the large man excitedly said, accidentally destroying yet another controller.

A maid hurriedly swapped it out with a new one that she handed Billy without an expression.

"Thea's family's controllers are pretty weak," Billy muttered. "Billy's old controllers almost never broke."

Since everything was dealt with they started to gather their things as they headed toward the courtyard where a car was waiting. By this time Thea came over, while Henry and Adran were still in the middle of a meeting. Zac felt a bit reluctant, as he had hoped he would be able to hang around a bit longer. But there was simply too much to do.

"Stay safe," Thea simply said as Zac opened the door.

"You too. I'll hopefully see you in a bit," Zac answered with a smile as he entered the car.

The return was pretty uneventful, and Zac stepped out of the teleporter with the others just twenty minutes later. Calrin left to resume their tasks and Billy wanted to see the town, so he went with him. The giant had become exceptionally excited to hear there were hundreds of Sky Gnomes at the Thayer Consortia and wanted to check it out. Only Emily and Alea remained, and after some hesitation Emily said she was going to the Academy to train.

"Wait," Zac suddenly said as he took out the painting he bought with Credits from Yrial.

"Wha- What is this? Is this your hobby now? No wonder you didn't make a move on Thea," Emily blurted out, a small blush spreading across her face as she gazed at Yrial's portrait.

Zac flicked her forehead to bring her back to reality, and he started to wonder whether he was making the right move giving this thing away.

"Snap out of it," Zac said. "This is a Dao Painting of Yrial, the Lord of Cycles."

"WHAT? This guy is the Lord of Cycles? He's too good looking. He could even become a pop star in Korea," she squealed. "That old statue is way uglier than the real thing."

Zac froze for a bit as he realized that what Emily said was true. The statue in the repository only looked androgynous, and it lacked the perfection of Yrial's face. Did the Celestial Artisan intentionally make Yrial uglier out of spite? He remembered that the statue of the real Brazla was extremely dashing. But he shook his head to refocus.

"Well, don't mind that," Zac said. "I got this from the Lord of Cycles since it can help one to improve Elemental Daos. I think it is especially effective for Daos related to Fire and Ice since they were the main paths the Lord of Cycles took. I don't walk that path so it won't really help me, but I'm sure many in the academy can benefit from it."

"So what do you want me to do with this thing?" she said, her eyes repeatedly heading over to the pristine face in the painting.

"Bring it to Alyn. It might help the students progress faster in getting Dao seeds," Zac said.

"You know, my class is a bit related to the elements. You saw my burning axe. Perhaps I can keep it-," Emily ventured.

"Stop," Zac sighed. "Just bring it to Alyn and let her decide what to do with it."

"Fine," Emily muttered and took it before heading over to the Academy.

That left Zac alone in the compound with Alea.

"Speak with Janos and Ilvere. Prepare the armies. Our enemies are weak Zombies, so bring as many as possible. Quantity seems more effective than quality against those things," Zac said. "And send someone to the Monastery to see if they are okay or need assistance."

"It is about time we weed out the weaklings and those who only want benefits without providing anything in return," Alea said with a nod as she walked toward the exit.

"I much prefer your rugged face above that girly boy," Alea suddenly said with a final wink before she left, leaving an embarrassed Zac behind.

Zac shook his head before a wry smile as he walked back toward the teleporter. He had to admit it was nice to at least have one person preferring him over the annoyingly handsome Yrial.

Since the operation was starting in only two days Zac immediately headed over to Mystic Island. The small camp had long been replaced with a proper settlement. However, it was completely military in nature, and mostly housed barracks and training grounds for the stronger students and warriors of the academy.

A couple of human soldiers walk back toward the barracks, all of them sporting various degrees of wounds. But they were still full of vigor, meaning their gathering trip had likely been pretty successful. Zac's new robe was quite eye-catching, and he got a few questioning or even taunting glares from the soldiers. However, those people were quickly dragged away by horrified comrades who recognized who he was.

He didn't mind such a thing happening. He already knew that Alyn was trying to foster a competitive and slightly ruthless environment for the Academy. As long as it didn't cause problems he didn't mind. They would all be tempered in the upcoming war. Standing face to face with millions of zombies would test anyone's mettle.

Zac immediately headed to the core of the island, and he noted that the beasts had improved quite a bit since he visited the last time. He sensed multiple auras belonging to beasts at the E-Grade, though none of the auras were as strong as that of the tiger.

To gain the last levels before the assault would be impossible, so Zac instead focused his efforts on consolidating his latest gains. He would have preferred a bit stronger enemies to push himself against, but there were simply none around.

He spent the next hour testing the Seed of Rot with his various attacks, and he was quite satisfied with the result. As he expected the blade didn't get stronger, but the attacks did gain an interesting effect.

It only took a second after wounding a beast before the wound started to look extremely infected, turning swollen and leaking pus. The animals were also noticeably weakened by the strikes, and with enough wounds they became so weak that they couldn't even move. When it got to that stage the animals would die not much later, their carcasses completely rotted out.

This Dao was only effective when drawing blood though. He had no problems imbuing his hand with the Dao of Rot, but a punch didn't cause the debilitating effect on the beasts. It did show some effectiveness if he hit a bleeding wound, but still not to the same degree as when imbuing his weapon.

The robes also proved to be extremely good and provided far better protection compared to the golden robes he took from Tyrbat. They even had a passive shield that continuously lessened the force of any incoming attack, though there was a limit to its effect.

It was as though there was an orb of water around him, and any attack would first have to rip through that invisible sphere. But as the defensive sphere weakened the attack, so did the defensive option

weaken. After a while the passive shield would completely run out, at which point it needed to absorb energy from the atmosphere for a few minutes.

There was also a stronger active shield like the old ones, though only one charge. Finally, there was another skill, though Zac wasn't able to activate it at the moment. It was a fractal that was engraved right over his heart, but it was completely dim just like most of the fractals on [Verun's Bite].

The robe was the second Spirit Tool he possessed for personal use, and there was one slightly confusing difference between the two. He had tried to make contact with whatever Tool Spirit that was housed inside the robes, but he could only sense an indistinct consciousness inside. It was like a breeze touched his consciousness, without intellect or personality.

He didn't understand why there was such a difference between the two items. The only thing he could think of was the mysterious rock from the auction that he fed Verun. It was only after he got that item that Verun started appearing in battle.

It only took another hour for him to get used to the improved power of his other Daos, leaving him ample time to work on [Cyclic Strike] again. But the results weren't promising.

If it wasn't for his new gear keeping the beasts at bay he would have looked like a beggar after a while. He had long lost count of how many times beasts had slammed into him or tried to tear him apart with their sharp claws.

He hadn't even been able to activate the skill in a controlled environment earlier, and it had proven even harder in the middle of battle. The problem was that he needed to split his attention in two and infuse each fractal with the same amount of mental energy.

He only managed to maintain the balance when he infused small trickles of energy into the fractals, but that was no good. It would take minutes to activate the skill in this manner, and the moment a beast attacked him he lost concentration and the skill fizzled.

Zac even swapped over to his Draugr form to test whether he had an easier time using the skill there. But he quickly discovered that his Draugr constitution did not afford him any better control over manipulating the Daos.

Perhaps this was the way that his lack of aptitude took form. He might not have a very hard time learning to utilize the Dao, but his control wasn't very smooth instead.

Since he was already in his undead form he tried his new shield for a bit as well. It performed above expectations, and the beasts below E-Grade did not even manage to leave a scratch on it. The spikes were extremely sturdy as well, and Zac found it particularly effective to imbue them with the Dao of Rot.

One shield slam would gore a deep wound into the animal, and with the Dao Seed a festering wound would be left behind, quickly weakening the target. The active attack also performed quite well, and while it couldn't kill an E-Grade beast it helped set up a kill with his axe. If he only got [Cyclic Strike] to work as well he would gain quite a bit of lethality with his Undead Bulwark skill.

But he had remembered something in the excitement of the latest gains from the inheritance. He possessed another offensive skill to bolster his undead form.

It was [Unholy Strike], the skill that he found among Mhal's belongings.