

The Fall 431

Chapter 431: Nine Reincarnations

Zac was like a statue as he gazed at a particular spot on the Ladder. How had such a change come to be?

Ladder - Level

Rank

Name

Level

1

Super Brother-Man

75

2

Thea Marshall

68

3

Thwonkin' Billy

64

4

Enigma

61

5

Daoist Chosui

60

6

Silverfox

60

7

Guru Anaad Phakiwar

59

8

Thomas Fischer

58

9

Francis

58

10

Lotus

58

...

100

Blizzard King

53

Ladder - Wealth

Rank

Name

1

Super Brother-Man

2

Smaug

3

Greed

4

Enigma

5

Thea Marshall

6

Henry Marshall

7

Djinn

8

Thwonkin' Billy

9

Francis

10

The Eternal Eye

Ladder - Dao

Rank

Name

1

Super Brother-Man

2

Guru Anaad Phakiwar

3

Thea Marshall

4

Abbot Boundless Truth

5

The Eternal Eye

6

Pretty Pretty Mega Kenzie

7

Silverfox

8

Thwonkin' Billy

9

Daoist Chosui

10

Father Thomas

The shocking change was obviously Billy and Thea having gained a massive surge in levels since he checked last. He had taken a look just a few days ago, and Thea was level 65 at that time, while Billy was level 61. That meant they had both gained a tremendous amount of energy in an instant, since less than an hour had passed on the outside since he looked.

But the real shocker was perhaps that Billy had surged to the 8th spot on the Dao Ladder. Before this, he wasn't even ranked, and Zac wasn't sure he even possessed an Early Mastery Dao Seed. Zac couldn't imagine that simple giant pondering on the intricacies of the Dao, but Billy was like an onion.

Every time they met Zac learned one more surprising layer to Billy, from the golden blood to the sleep cultivation. It wouldn't be surprising if someone like that possessed disgustingly high affinity with some Dao, and it only took him some time to figure it out. Judging by the fact that he had also gained multiple levels pointed toward the fact that he had gained it mid-battle.

Zac was happy for his friends, but more so he was worried. Had something happened on the outside that would prompt Thea and Billy to take such a risk? The only way to gain multiple levels in one go was for them to defeat a powerful E-Grade invader, probably a General from the Undead Incursion or a leader from one of the few remaining ones neighboring the Dead Zone.

Thea was aware that he would return in a day or two, but yet she had risked her life in such a fight. Zac almost regretted looking at the ladder after seeing the change, as a seed of worry had been planted in his heart. But he could only shake it off and focus on his climb. He would leave this place in 50 days, which was just a few hours on the outside.

Apart from the sudden jump by Thea And Billy nothing much had changed since he last checked the ladder, apart from the occasional movement here and there. Francis and Lotus were two new names in the top ten, though Zac had seen them in the top 30 since the beginning.

He had no idea who Lotus was, but Francis was one of the human councilors of the Underworld Council. He had usually hovered between rank 15 and 20, but he had upped his game since he arrived to the surface. Apart from him and Enigma there were two more councilors at the power Ladder, though Zac only knew Gregor personally. It was the man he had met just after taking over the Union. He currently sat at the 54th position with level 55.

The other elites of earth hadn't been idle either, and you now needed to have reached level 53 to get a spot. That meant that there were potentially thousands of people who had attained their level 50 skills by now, something that could bring a huge boost in strength to the Native Armies.

It wasn't bad, but Zac still felt it wasn't enough. He understood why human wave tactics were the only reliable option against incursions unless someone like him appeared. How would a single level 50 warrior take down those leaders he had fought? Even a dozen of them would be useless.

Zac couldn't see the earthlings defeating a leader, or even a general, unless thousands of people sacrificed themselves to exhaust the invader's Cosmic Energy. Even if the Undead Empire hadn't appeared on earth there was probably not much hope for the earthlings. He even guessed that Thea and Billy had paid some extraordinary cost to win whatever fight they had found themselves in.

The invaders would have created permanent outposts, killing or enslaving the local population as they drained the planet of all its wealth. Earth was simply too slow in responding, with only a scant few of the incursions being closed while the invaders were heavily restricted and unable to use arrays.

The movements of the other two ladders were even more static than that of the power ladder. A few names had changed as people died or stopped progressing, but it took a lot for those ladders to move. The Dao Ladder stayed almost completely the same since the large reshuffling that the Dao Funnel brought about, except for Billy.

Half the Dao Ladder was still filled with former spiritual leaders such as monks and priests, with the rest being powerhouses. There wasn't a lot going on with the wealth ladder either. A lot of names had dropped off after Zac conquered the Underworld Union, such as Little Treasure. Much of his wealth had been tied to the Union, and were now part of Port Atwood's coffers.

But Greed, another former Union member who fled, somehow maintained his spot. It meant that he either carried a massive fortune on his person, or that he possessed intangible assets like a Mercantile License. Djinn was a new arrival, but he wasn't in any of the other two ladders. Zac guessed he had found a huge treasure that spiraled him to the top in one go.

In any case, he could breathe out in relief since he saw that all the Valkyries, Kenzie, and Emily were safe, meaning that Port Atwood probably wasn't facing some immediate danger. It allowed him to keep climbing without too many distractions. Hopefully, Thea's actions were simply the result of impatience rather than desperation.

Zac closed the ladders and he immediately picked the Soul Strengthening Manual. The reasoning for him was simple. The Beast Rearing Manual felt pretty useless to him, but the other two were both tempting. Eventually it came down to choosing between Power and Survivability.

The Body Tempering Manual would probably make him stronger as long as practicing it didn't mess up his body, but he was already plenty powerful for his level. The Soul Strengthening Manual on the other hand could help him strengthening his Soul, which was something Zac desperately needed in his fight against the Splinter.

He had already sensed the difference an empowered soul could have on him during his previous fight. The splinter had been truly agitated due to the mind invasion, but Zac had yet been able to stay mostly calm through the fight. If it had been before he would probably have unleashed [Deforestation] in a muddled rage before he could analyze the situation.

The splinter was a constant worry, and he needed a long term solution that wasn't reliant on the Miasmic Fractals. This might be his only chance to get his hand on a Soul Strengthening Manual, and he had to take it even if it would slow down his cultivation or make him miss out on forming a constitution.

Besides, with his path of cultivation he would probably spend a lot of time on the sickbed, wounded from cracking open nodes by force. Galvarion had been forced to recuperate for centuries, and Zac might fare the same fate even with his constitution. Tempering his soul during the downtime would allow him to keep improving even when he was hurt.

The moment he made his choice he was immediately sent off to the next world, and he barely had time to stash the radiant crystal that appeared in his hand before the whole field around him shook as tens of thousands of bodies rose to their feet.

One quick look around seemed to indicate that he was on a battlefield between an insectoid species and a mix of their undead counterparts and humanoid zombies, and judging by the groans and roars from the surroundings the undead had won.

[Rebuff the Invasion.]

Zac wasn't surprised to see the quest, and he summoned the independent fractal blade of [Chop] to start clearing out the surroundings while he got his bearings. If he was supposed to rebuff the invasion he needed to find either the incursion of the undead, or whatever means they had used to arrive at this planet.

After that the most straightforward thing would be to cull the leaders of the invasion, which would hopefully force the soldiers to flee. Of course, it was a possibility that the leaders were far beyond his reach, at which point he would have to figure out to swing the war in the insectoid's favor.

But Zac suddenly frowned as he looked around the area, and his eyes started to shimmer as he activated [Cosmic Gaze]. Was the undead really the target?

"Something is going on!" a shout echoed out from the distance as a group of humanoids rushed toward Zac, pushing the slow-moving zombies out of the way. "Why the hell is one of the mercenaries among the children?"

Zac curiously looked and saw that the new group was drenched in darkness to his eyes. Every part of their bodies was covered in death-attuned energies, and it was easy figuring out that they were undead, though these ones were sapient. They were a mix of different humanoid species, and it looked like some of them had swapped out certain body parts.

The fact that they were all sapient meant that they were E-Grade race as far as Zac knew, but his knowledge about the undead was pretty much limited to what Anzonil had told him. Perhaps there were situations where even lower-tiered undead could gain intelligence.

"Please, my lord!" one of the humanoids shouted from afar after having stopped outside the reach of the fractal blade that was still reaping zombies left and right. "The children are innocent! They just haven't woken up yet, please don't waste your strength on them."

"Hmm," Zac shrugged noncommittally as he ordered his blade to return to his side.

He had already realized that something was odd even before the group of undead approached him. He had first thought that the scenario was an invasion of the Undead Empire, but the fact that the area was teeming with miasma made Zac realize that might not be the case.

A bunch of killed zombies certainly would release some miasma, but this battlefield essentially felt even more death-attuned than the core of the Dead Zone, and the effect wasn't nearly this pronounced in the battles he had fought with the undead outside their incursion.

Besides, some insectoid species were extremely invasive as well, just like the Ayr Hivebeasts. Given enough time they would swallow a whole world, and Zac knew there were many more species like it.

The scenario became clear after hearing the exchange between the undead. It looked like he was designated as some sort of mercenary, no doubt hired to help the undead forces to rebuff the insectoid invasion. Luckily he had some experience in dealing with insects, and the mission seemed straightforward enough.

Unfortunately, he was just caught red-handed slaughtering people from his own side. The only solution he could come up with was to act like an aloof master, which hopefully would allow him to not sour his relationship with the Undead Empire. It was best if he could keep his alliance with the undead to gather intelligence about his target.

"Thank you, my lord," the undead said as he scurried closer, allowing Zac to breathe out in relief.

The undead was level 60 at best, just a bit better than the extremely weak corpses around them. The low levels of the people made Zac believe this was a low-tiered world, just like the one before this.

"My Lord, I am not sure how you appeared here?" the man hesitantly asked as he stopped a few meters away from Zac.

"I got a bit lost," Zac said. "Can you lead the way out of here?"

"Certainly," the undead nodded. "The children won't attack you as long as you are accompanied by one of us."

Zac was slowly led out of the sea of zombies, and he quickly learned that it was not actually a battlefield, but rather a dumping ground where they had left a mix of acquired corpses and insectoid invaders to slowly turn into true undead. Zac's arrival had stirred them prematurely, and they would be kept there for some more time to gestate.

Zac was pretty curious about the society of the Undead Empire in general, but there was first one thing he wanted to check first. He quickly took out the luminous crystal he had just got, and he infused his mind into it to see what he had just got.

[Nine Reincarnations Manual]

Temper your spirit through nine reincarnations of life and death and form an impregnable soul, immune to the ravages of Samsara.

Zac's eyes lit up when he read the introduction, and any regret about missing out on a Body Tempering Manual disappeared. It looked like he had just hit the jackpot. Didn't this sound like a manual made for him with his ability to jump between being living and dead?