

The Fall 432

Chapter 432: Lord Draugr

Zac had no point of reference when it came to Soul Strengthening Manuals, but the one he held in his hand seemed to be pretty damn strong, even if he didn't have his unique constitution. It wasn't quite as tailored to his situation as he first had thought though, and it wasn't strictly limited to people who walked the Path of Life and Death.

The method to train in the manual was to push one's soul to the peak of life before plunging it to the depths of death, simulating a lifetime. After completing enough such revolutions one's soul would undergo a rebirth, shedding some of its imperfections and growing in strength.

If one managed to complete all nine reincarnations they would possess what the manual called a 'Nine-Samsara Soul', and it would be so strong that he essentially wouldn't even need mental protection skills like [Mental Fortress] to stay safe. His soul would turn even more monstrous than his nigh-indestructible body.

The number of revolutions one needed to complete a reincarnation wasn't clear, but judging by the language in the crystal it would be a massive undertaking to just complete a few reincarnations, let alone all nine. But Zac hoped that his ability to swap between life and death would be able to expedite the process, though that would probably require some experimentation.

There were two problems with the manual though.

For one, only the method for the first four reincarnations were included in the crystal. He would have to somehow find the rest elsewhere if he wanted to continue practicing the skill, and Zac had no idea where he would even begin his search for the missing pieces of a manual like this. He couldn't just jump into a bunch of Mystic Realms hoping to be lucky.

The fact that the manual was split up could also be seen as a positive though. Zac only gaining the earliest stages of the manual meant that it was probably beneficial even in higher grades. It would have been a shame if he got one that was only useful in E-Grade, after which he would have to swap to a new one.

The second problem with the manual was a bit tricky as well.

Each of the reincarnations required specific environments to practice. The first reincarnation only required him to meditate within one of two specific arrays, one death attuned and the other life-attuned. Kenzie no doubt could help him build two chambers meeting the requirements since Zac had the schematic, but she probably wasn't able to put them on Array Disks just yet.

Perhaps this is where his unique situation could come into play. If he could swap out the increasingly stringent requirements with simply swapping back and forth he would save an enormous amount of time and resources. It seemed unlikely that he would be able to practice the Manual inside the tower, though it wouldn't hurt to try it out.

Zac put away the crystal and looked over at the undead with some curiosity. This was the first time he had talked with a sapient undead, unless you counted his encounter with the Draugr woman in his vision.

"What race are you?" Zac suddenly asked, breaking the silence. "Oh, and what's your name?"

"Ah?" the undead who walked alongside him started.

"Is your race 'Zombie'? Or are you a Corpse-lord?" Zac asked with curiosity.

"A zombie is a derogatory term for those who still haven't awakened," the undead answered after some hesitation. "My name is Eldar and I am a Revenant, the most common Race of the undead."

"Could you explain a bit more? What's the Difference between a Corpse-lord and a Revenant?" Zac asked. "It seems we have the time."

"Well..." Eldar said with clear conflict on his face.

Zac understood what was troubling the Revenant, and he immediately had an idea. There was something he could test which might make the group more talkative.

"Wait a minute," Zac said as he stopped in his tracks.

The group of undead stopped and looked at Zac with confusion, and their eyes widened in shock as Zac's skin turned deathly pale and he started to release a massive amount of miasma around him. His brown eyes quickly darkened until they were two black globes leading into the abyss.

"Wha- how?" the undead sputtered with confusion on his face.

"I am Draugr. I simply used a skill to look like a human," Zac said as he turned his abyssal eyes toward the group. "I have been traveling among the living for all my life. This is the first time I actually stepped on death-attuned soil. I hope you can answer my questions and clear some points of confusion for me."

"I- ah, of course!" he said. "I am sorry, Lord Draugr."

Zac nodded in relief. This was one of the loopholes the trio had found during their climb, mostly thanks to Ogras' predilection of talking far and wide at any tavern he could find. Their races were never made an issue, as though the System forced all the natives to be enlightened and look past race.

However, if you mentioned your race they would understand you, in contrast to mentioning the Tower of Eternity. They hadn't found any use for that small feature though, until now. The revenants had already been respectful earlier when he was a powerful mercenary hired to help in the war, but now it was as though they looked upon an idol.

"I am sorry for the discourtesy just now," Eldar said as he bowed deeply.

"It is fine. I understand that you'd be hesitant to discuss this matter with the living," Zac said. "Now, about the races? I have traveled with my master my whole life, and he hasn't explained all these things for me for reasons I cannot disclose. But now that I am returning to the Empire I need this information."

It was a pretty horrible excuse, but judging by the attitudes of the group of Revenants they wouldn't question him no matter what he said.

"Ah? Yes Certainly!" Eldar hurriedly said though he looked pretty confused. "May I ask which Empire you are referring to? Our kingdom of Zarvadar borders no force that can be considered an Empire as far as I can tell."

Zac frowned in confusion for a second until he realized the problem. This world wasn't actually part of the Undead Empire. How would it be? It was part of the Tower. The inhabitants of the worlds were never aware of anything larger than their planet, and higher grade beings were mentioned as things of legend.

That meant that he, unfortunately, couldn't milk Eldar for information about the Undead Empire. Perhaps it wasn't completely a loss though, since there were still a lot of things that he might know. There was only one undead force in the multiverse as far as Zac could tell, and this world should no doubt be based on the situation in the Undead Empire.

"Nevermind, I cannot divulge," Zac coughed. "Now, about the races?"

"As you probably know, most of our population comes from corpses awakening, just like the field you saw earlier," Eldar said, eager to please. "Only the powerful can conceive children of their own, so adoption is more common. And these types of children are all Revenants."

"However, the undead are special in that some can change their races to a certain degree, though supreme existences such as Lord Draugr does not need such things. Some shed their mortal coil through a ritual to turn into pure beings of miasma. They gain races such as wraiths and specters," the revenant explained. "A few others choose to become Corpselords."

"Corpselords are a manufactured race. They are built by taking extraordinary bodyparts from multiple sources, creating a stronger than average body. Their progeny inherit a mix of their parent's bodies, which can both turn out great and pretty bad. Corpselord clans are usually subservient clans to either Liches or one of the five noble races, as their origin is that their ancestors were created."

"Does Corpselords have any weaknesses?" Zac asked.

"Well, combining bodyparts is a hard venture, and only the most skilled Liches can do it without side effects. Most Corpselords are cursed with their bodyparts being in dissonance. They need to take medicine to quell the effects, and they are always looking for more compatible bodyparts. The risk for an earlier descent into madness is also pretty high."

"Then why would a Revenant choose to become such a being?" Zac asked with confusion.

"Ah, lord Draugr might not know, but cultivation comes hard to us Revenants. We are not blessed with your talents, and becoming a corpse lord is somewhat of a shortcut to power some chooses to take," Eldar explained, not without some helplessness on his face. "Most revenants are forever stuck at the F-Grade, unable to truly enter the path of cultivation."

Zac slowly nodded, remembering Mhal, the Corpselord general. His research had been related to this subject. Infusing Draugr genes into one's body would be able to increase the affinity with miasma, and perhaps even decrease the dissonance between bodyparts.

"Nevermind," Zac said, realizing he asked something he shouldn't have. "Are Liches one of the noble races?"

"Liches aren't a race," Eldar said with a shake of his head. "It's more of a position, as well as a branching class tree. Creators of undead, miasma controllers. That incubation field you ended up in was

maintained by a group of Liches for example. They're needed to speed up the awakening of the children. But there are also many combat-oriented sub-classes."

"So what race are they?" Zac asked with confusion.

"Most are Revenants, but the most skilled Liches are of course among the five noble races. Apart from the Eternal Clan who exclusively follow the Sanguine Path."

"I know of the Eternal Clan," Zac slowly said. "But what about the other three races?"

"Apart from your noble bloodline, there is the Izh'Rak Reavers. Their bodies are the strongest of all undead races, without being burdened with any of the demerits the Corpse Lords have. Then there is the Eidolon, the leaders of the specters," Eldar explained. "They are the only spectral race that is born that way, never having shed their physical form through the ritual. Most believe their control over miasma is second only to the Founders."

"Do you know what the founders look like?" Zac asked. "My master never told me."

Zac had no idea who these founders were, but he had an inkling. He kind of wanted to ask to make sure, but he saw the gazes of the group of Revenants. He had clearly asked a bit too much, and Zac was afraid that going too far would label him an imposter or something, making his quest all that harder.

"No, the form of the exalted Founders are beyond the knowledge of remote Kingdoms such as ours. They are the origin of our species, I am sure they live in far greater places than here. Places where the Miasma is dense enough to turn liquid," Eldar sighed, clear longing on his face.

Zac's eyes lit up when he heard Eldar's explanation. One popular theory was that the undead races were created by one single powerhouse, someone at the level of Emperor Limitless. He would probably have become an Apostate if he appeared in this era, but this all happened before the System arrived as the undead existed even before the System.

These founders might be the descendants of this grand ancestor, and if that was the case it wasn't surprising they would be considered the greatest undead race.

After some more questioning, he got a pretty decent understanding of the undead Races. The Draugr could be considered the jack-of-all-trades of the five noble races. Their bodies weren't as excellent as the Izh'Rak Reavers, and their affinity with miasma wasn't as great as the Eidolon. But they still excelled on both those subjects, making them excellent all-rounders.

The Eternal Clan followed the Sanguine Path as Eldar called it, and it even seemed to be some confusion whether the members were really undead or not. Some believed they were rather a closely allied race that had decided to join the undead for some reason.

"Thank you," Zac finally said after he had satiated most of his curiosity.

There was still a lot that he wanted to know, but he felt that it would be too suspicious if he kept going. He instead turned his attention to something else.

"Where are we heading?" Zac asked as he looked at the desolate surroundings.

"We have set up a fort an hour's travel from here," Eldar explained. "You and the other mercenaries were supposed to be placed under General Niksi, but now I am not sure..."

Zac understood what he meant. Perhaps it would breach some sort of protocol for some normal undead to order around a Draugr.

"I need a place with both miasma and Normal Cosmic energy," Zac said, switching subjects.

"Certainly," Eldar said, though his face looked like Zac had asked for a huge pile of feces to be placed in his bed. "We have already erected arrays to convert the energies for our guests. I'm sure one of the array masters can make some adjustments."

Zac nodded in thanks as he thought of his next move. He didn't have a lot of time on his hands, but if there was one floor he should stay some time extra on, wouldn't it be this one? Where else would he be able to find assistance in grinding the levels of his skills? Where else would he get tips on controlling miasma?

It was time to integrate into undead society.