

The Fall 433

Chapter 433: War

“Charge!” Zac roared as he pushed forward, each step causing the ground to shudder as his frame grew and quickly became ensconced in pitch-black armor.

Ten thousand Revenant warriors roared in response, charging the insectoid army without any care for their lives as a thick haze of miasma covered the battlefield hundreds of meters in each direction. One after another fell as they approached the defensive line, but a fanatical gleam burned in the eyes of the survivors as they kept running.

Zac had severely underestimated the impact a purebred Draugr had in undead societies. He had figured it would be something like an elite on earth. It would elicit some admiration and perhaps jealousy, but nothing too extravagant. But he had been sorely mistaken.

He had been given a king’s welcome the moment he arrived at the base camp, and the Revenant general had even offered her position to him without hesitation. However, Zac had declined, instead opting to take command of an elite troop of 10 000 warriors with the intent to train his skills.

Anzonil, the old horndog, had also hit the mark on the pull of his race to the opposite sex. He had essentially been visited half of the eligible E-Grade females in the kingdom by this point. He had only managed to stave them off by indicating that any spread of his bloodline would be met with swift and bloody retribution by his elders.

He knew the effect wouldn’t be that pronounced in the real Undead Empire though, as there apparently had been no one from the five noble races visiting the kingdom of Zarvadar for millennia. Giving birth to a progeny that was even half-Draugr would skyrocket that family into the stratosphere.

The interest had barely waned from the threat of his imaginary elders though, and joining the battlefield had as much been an escape from the incessant courtships as it was a way to improve his skills.

He had already confirmed that the floor guardian was a ‘breeder’, which was a specialized clone of the queen. She resided in a hive that had fallen out of the sky one day, continuously spewing out new soldiers. The original script was probably to help the war efforts to the point that a large-scale attack on the hive was possible, though Zac felt somewhat confident in assaulting the place alone after getting a grasp on the power levels involved in the struggle.

However, Zac wasn’t quite ready to leave this floor yet as he had found it extremely rewarding to use his class as it was intended.

Zac was almost upon the defensive line of the insectoid army he had targeted, and he quickly summoned the massive shield from [Immutable Bulwark]. It had slightly changed shape to look like the armor he wore when using [Vanguard of Undeath], and he used it as a wall breaker when he slammed into the row of hulking insectoid brutes that held the front line.

The specialized defenders were even larger than Zac in his transformed form, but they still flew out of the way as though they were made from styrofoam as Zac ripped into the army. A hundred skeleton warriors rose from the miasmic mists the moment Zac had pushed his way inside, hacking and slashing in every direction.

They caused massive confusion among the attackers, which allowed Zac's subordinates to widen the breach into a massive hole. Soon enough the Revenant army cut their way through the middle of the army, wedging themselves in and forcing the insectoids to split in the middle. The roars of battle echoed in Zac's ears, and it felt like the battle lust of his warriors empowered him.

In fact, the accumulated killing intent of an army of the dead had been the key to upgrading [Indomitable], and it had pushed to Middle Proficiency during his first skirmish. He had initially thought that the only way to improve the skill was to be hit with mental attacks, but he realized he had been completely wrong.

Hundreds of ranged attacks soared toward the vanguard, and Zac infused his fractal shield with the Seed of Sanctuary, quickly increasing its size to encompass the elite core of his army. The Seed was nowhere as strong as his Fragment of the Coffin, but the coffin didn't help increase the area he could protect.

Unfortunately, he would soon lose even this capability, which was the downside of abandoning the Fragment of the Shield in favor of his Life-Death duality. Whatever Fragment the Seed of Sanctuary turned into, it would no doubt be life-attuned, which would probably make it impossible to use with his current class.

Of course, the Revenant army wasn't helpless even if Zac couldn't protect them all. They formed a second layer of defense in the sky that blocked out most of the attacks, and the soldiers ripped into the insectoid ranks with brutal fervor. Meanwhile, ten massive beacons were erected, and nine enormous cauldrons were placed between them.

It made Zac remember Mhal and his elite army. He had used cauldrons as well, though the way these warriors used it was slightly different. Massive black clouds started to billow out of the cauldrons in no time, and Zac knew it was a death-attuned poison that only affected the living. Dozens of liches instructed the mists to

Zac had learned that the spellcasters of the undead armies generally followed three heritages. First were the poison masters such as the lich in his squad, using toxins to cause widespread death. There were also many ice-attuned mages who fused death and frost into extremely potent attacks that turned enemies into frozen statues.

Finally, there were the soul manipulators who used mental attacks, curses, and illusions. However, these specialists were extremely rare and usually required inborn affinities, sort of like the purifiers on earth. There were certainly more classes, but these three were the most common, at least in this kingdom.

Zac had thought it had something to do with affinities, but the reason was a lot more pragmatic. The spellcasters of the undead armies leaned toward classes that would leave the corpses of their enemies intact. A fireball could turn a dozen warriors into cinders, but that would mean that the kingdom missed out on having a dozen new soldiers join their ranks.

The battle quickly turned into the undead's favor, and not just because Zac mowed through the army like a bulldozer. The two sides were almost equal in strength before his arrival, and the single addition of [Fields of Despair] had tipped the scales in the Revenant's favor.

Zac had only utilized parts of the skill until now, the part that recovered miasma from kills and the part that weakened enemies. But with an army of the dead at his command he could utilize the skill to its full effect, where the also undead around him also benefitted from the skill.

He had initially expected that all the miasma released from kills would go to him, but [Fields of Despair] actually provided the energy to the one who landed the killing blow. So the skill didn't just weaken the enemies, but it also increased the endurance of the undead, allowing them to keep fighting.

Using skills as they were intended was the best way to increase their proficiency. Zac had managed to push [Fields of Despair] to late proficiency after just a few fights, and the skill reaching late proficiency actually benefitted him.

Back when he upgraded the skill to middle proficiency the only thing that changed was that the skill's coverage more than doubled. Upgrading it to late proficiency had doubled the area once again, and by this point it was able to cover almost a third of a battlefield this size. One more upgrade and he would probably be able to cover a square kilometer in miasma.

That wasn't the only benefit the skill provided after getting upgraded. He could actually feel the combatants within the mist now. The effect was nowhere near as comprehensive as the omniscience of [Hatchetman's Spirit], but it was more akin to having radar and sensing everyone in the mist like hazy blips.

He wouldn't be able to use the new feature to dodge attacks, but he would be a lot harder to sneak up on this way. Hiding within the miasmic mists would be impossible without possessing some sort of counter.

"I'm going in," Zac said to the two powerful warriors who had fought right behind him the whole time

They were his two assigned lieutenants, each chosen due to their ability to stay alive in the head of the battle.

"We'll hold the line," Yrvos, a Revenant created from a massive Ogre, grunted as he crushed an enemy with his barrel-sized mallet.

Zac nodded before slamming one of his feet into the ground, disappearing in a puff of miasma. He immediately appeared in front of a group of massive ants at the rear of the army, each of them well into the E-Grade. They were war beasts that the insectoids reared, and one of the most powerful weapons in their repertoire.

Sitting on their backs were a group of commanders and beastmasters, and it seemed as though they had been expecting Zac's appearance. Ten pillars of light appeared around them, forming an array with Zac and the ants in the middle. A pressure immediately started to push down on him, whereas the insectoids seemed unaffected at all.

Zac frowned as he looked around, but he still proceeded with his plans as he stomped the ground again, erecting the cage of [Profane Seal]. The mists of [Fields of Despair] were joined by the black churning clouds of [Winds of Decay]. He didn't imbue the mists with the Dao of the Coffin though, but he had rather chosen to imbue [Profane Seal] with it.

His Dao Fragment had amazing synergy with the skill, and not using the two together would be a wasted opportunity. First, it made the five towers and their corresponding gates pretty much impervious to the outside forces who tried to break in and assist their leaders. Secondly, they empowered the chains immensely.

The spectral chains had become a bit useless against the targets Zac mainly focused on with the skill, instantly crumbling from the attacks of the powerhouses. But the chains now required tremendous effort to destroy by the insectoids, making them far more lethal. They also gained a corrosive effect when they attacked and could even deal significant damage by just lashing opponents.

Zac felt as though he was mired in quicksand due to the array, and he was utterly incapable of dodging the rabid attacks from the massive ants who tried to gore him with their sharp legs. But he had never planned on dodging anything anyways, and he immediately started to whittle down the massive insects with the help of [Deathwish].

The E-Grade warriors quickly realized their plan had failed, and they jumped down from the backs of the ants to increase the pressure. But Zac was like a whirlwind of death as his massive miasmic bardiche ripped through the thick plating of the ants and the bodies of the insectoid leaders alike.

The massive pressure he was under from the array started to take its toll though, and he was starting to run a bit low on miasma. However, Zac didn't worry as one of the gates to [Profane Seal] soundlessly opened while Zac kept the insectoids busy.

The doors closed again just a second later, while But one pillar after another exploded as spectral warriors appeared out of nowhere, killing the array masters and dismantling the array in seconds. After they had completed their main mission they started to take out the normal soldiers in the cage that the spectral chains still hadn't dealt with.

Zac wouldn't have any issue dealing with the array himself, but he wanted to use the various squads in his employ as much as possible. It wasn't due to something as noble as giving his soldiers a chance to grow through battle. Zac knew very little about the war tactics of the undead, apart from the mindless hordes of the unawakened zombies.

Alea had partly suffered her grievous wounds due to lacking knowledge as well, not expecting to get ambushed by ghosts like that. He didn't want that kind of surprise to happen to his armies in the clash against the Undead Incursion.

He had unearthed all kinds of knowledge during the three days he'd stayed on this floor. One small tidbit was that the spectral warriors couldn't pass through Dao-infused surfaces or skills with enough power. That's why he needed to open the door for the ghosts to enter his cage. Similarly, if warriors had their Dao Field unleashed they wouldn't be ambushed out of nowhere as the spectral warriors would be slowed by quite a bit.

Having one's Dao Field constantly active would put a drain on one's soul, but it would be worth it in the heat of battle to avoid unwelcome surprises such as getting skewered from a ghost popping out of the ground.

With the threat of the way Zac methodically killed off the leaders one by one, leaving just the largest ant alive. Zac no longer had any means to see its level, but he guessed it was around level 85 and focused on Endurance. It was a perfect target for his daily practice.

"You can go," Zac said with his deep voice.

The ghosts who had remained inside the cage until now bowed before they streamed out through a gate that Zac opened, leaving Zac alone inside. Zac cracked his neck as he looked at the target dummy in front of him.

The past three days had been full of failures, but today he'd conjure those bronze sparks no matter what.