

## The Fall 498

### Chapter 498: Go Time

Zac wasn't confident that their mobile illusion array would do them any good against the defenses of the Undead Empire. He figured that they would be able to hide more efficiently as a small group of humanoids in a forest that was no doubt teeming with zombies, rather than on top of a lustrous giant leaf ripping through the otherwise dour sky.

There was no way that the Lich King hadn't erected any defensive arrays now that the realignment was so close, but there was a very big difference between a passively running array and an array actively controlled by an array master. Perhaps they would be able to crack open the entrance if they caught the Lich King by surprise.

Besides, they would have to be on the ground anyway if they wanted to deploy any of the array breakers they had brought.

The group landed inside the forest, and everyone already wore some sort of equipment that hid their life-attuned aura. Ogras and Zac increased the effect even further by adding a layer of shadows and dousing them in his Dao Field for the Fragment of the Coffin.

The coffin wasn't strictly Death-Attuned just yet, but it was death-adjacent, and it helped them blend into the surroundings a lot better than if they just walked in as-is. They soon got a chance at testing the efficacy of their disguise as they spotted a mob of zombies lumbering about. But they could breathe out in relief when their small group could walk by completely unnoticed.

The zombies treated them as though they were air, and the group kept running further toward the core of the Dead Zone. Of course, that small encounter wasn't enough for them to relax. Those zombies were still unawakened, which meant they were as dumb as they came. Real Revenants might not be able to sense that their group was alive, but they would no doubt understand that something was amiss with a group of strangers running toward their stronghold.

Luckily it seemed that the undead didn't bother planting any spectral scouts in the forest. Perhaps they figured that the increasingly dense number of zombies would be enough as an early warning, or perhaps they didn't even care if anyone came all this way, confident in their defensive capabilities.

But the group of 11 still avoided any undead they spotted as they inched closer to their target. It forced them to take some detours, but it still only took them three hours until reached their target, the true inner sanctum of the Dead Zone. Or rather the barrier that blocked them off from it.

Massive pitch-black runes hovered in the air, each of them humming with strength. They formed a long wall that stretched kilometers in each direction, and Zac could vaguely spot massive Unholy Beacons some distance behind them, no doubt powering them with a steady flow of power.

There was no physical wall acting as a foundation, but that didn't mean the barrier would be any easier to deal with. This was something that made use of the Dead Zone itself, and it would no doubt require a massive blast to crack open. However, reaching the target wasn't the only trouble they faced.

There was also the even thicker wall of zombies that stood between them and the array. The density of the undead lumbering about in the forest had gradually increased as the density of Miasma did, and

they currently had zombies within 30 meters in pretty much every direction by now. However, they almost formed a solid wall of putrid flesh along the defensive array in front of them.

The swarm of zombies was well over twenty meters thick, and it seemed to stretch endlessly in each direction along the barrier. Millions and millions of former citizens of earth turned into nothing more than an unliving fortification. At least that was what Zac figured they were, as this band of zombies definitively hadn't come about naturally.

"How the hell are we supposed to sneak in like this?" Ogras spat. "There is no way that the people inside won't be alerted if we start killing this rabble."

"Can't we just walk past them?" Emily asked. "Isn't that what our talismans are for?"

"No way," the demon said as he threw a humored glance at the teenager. "They're stupid, but not that stupid. Besides, I bet there is some failsafe for that."

"Some sort of diversion?" Zac muttered.

He briefly considered using the thing he had gotten from Void's Disciple, but he eventually decided against it. This was still just an outer shield, and the real forces of the Lich King were nowhere in sight. Using that thing right now was a waste, and better left to use as a surprise when Zac was right in front of his target.

Besides, Void had said that he was meant to activate the black crystal it inside a 'castle' and there were nothing of the sort in sight just yet. That point alone made Zac a bit worried. It meant that his whole idea to sneak attack the leaders had already failed. Even if they rushed inside after blasting through the wall the Lich King would probably be ready to meet their assault.

Still, they had managed to get pretty close without getting noticed, which was worth something. It would be too late to recall larger forces to defend by this point, and there was no way undead general stationed in the horde would be able to come back in time.

"Can't be anything big," Ogras slowly said. "We want these rotting bastards out of the way without causing a scene. We need to hit the shield before the owners inside notice us. If they take active control it will be twice as hard to break inside."

"What about Miasma Crystals?" Emily ventured. "We throw a few of them to the left and one to the right. I heard that zombies search out things that benefit their strength instinctively. Shouldn't that split them up?"

The idea of throwing out Miasma Crystals as breadcrumbs sounded extraordinarily stupid, but it quickly became apparent that no one had a better idea. Joanna proposed they dig a tunnel, but Zac remembered how the slightest tremor in the earth was immediately exposed by geomancers when fighting the second beast wave.

Orgas also suggested for Zac to somehow telepathically control them in his Draugr form, but he simply had no way to do that.

Though to be fair, turning into a Draugr might push the zombies away, as there was a massive inherent difference in caste between the noble races and some newly turned zombies without sapience. But he wanted to keep that as an ace in the hole, so they had no better option than going with Emily's plan.

Dozens of F-Grade Miasma Crystals soared through the air and landed in the densely packed groups of zombies as Zac started to throw them to their left and right. It took a few seconds for the undead to register what was going on, but they slowly started to congregate toward the energy-rich crystals on the ground.

It created a five-meter wide corridor almost completely devoid of zombies in front of them, and the group unhesitantly rushed forward and set up an illusion array right next to the barrier. A few zombies seemed to feel that something was amiss, but they soon joined the others in the struggle for Miasma Crystals after they couldn't see anything odd in their surroundings.

This close to the barrier they could finally spot an almost completely transparent black film blocking them like a wall, proving the shield covered every inch of the Core Zone. Kenzie immediately set up a set of mobile arrays that blocked out their presence, meaning the Zombies wouldn't find them even if they lost interest in the Miasma Crystals.

However, there was clearly no love lost between the zombies, and the attraction of the crystals was beyond their expectation as undead fought tooth and nail for them. It was just a matter of time before the ruckus was exposed or the zombies started getting ripped apart, so they were still against the clock.

The group had gone over the plan multiple times on the leaf and as they ran through the forest, and now was the time to put it into action. Zac and Ogras were both imbued with a fiery axe, whereas Kenzie got the one crackling with lightning that improved Intelligence and Wisdom. This was the benefit Emily had gotten from upgrading the proficiency of the skill. She could now boost three people in total, but she was only able to get one boost per type.

The six valkyries each took out a large engraved spike and stuck it into the ground, forming a perfect circle within their bubble. They then placed their massive bulwarks outside them to prevent any interference while further isolating their small circle. Kenzie withdrew a densely inscribed skull that emitted scorching heat, along with a bunch of Flame Crystals they had dug up from Zac's new mine in the underworld.

Six chains were attached to the skull in various positions, and the six valkyries each took one and attached it to their respective spike, effectively fettering the head to the ground. Kenzie made sure that the inscriptions held and that the array flags were properly planted, and Zac couldn't help but look at the odd scene with bemusement.

This was one of the array breakers he had found in the mentalist's Spatial Ring, and Kenzie had chosen this one for two reasons. First of all, it was fire-attuned, which seemed pretty effective against the undead based both on Zac's experiences and looking at the Church of the Everlasting Dao. Secondly, it was one of the breakers that were simple to use, with the downside that it carried low strength on its own.

Its strength was rather based on the power of the people infusing it. The users would feed it with their energy and Dao, and the Array would convert it into an attack especially suited for burning a hole in an

array. It would allow Zac to not only take advantage of his recent boost in energy circulation but also release a blast of power without wasting any of his long cooldown attacks on the wall.

"Give me a few seconds," Kenzie said as she pushed one spike after another down into the ground, forming yet another array surrounding the treasure in the middle. "Get ready to infuse the main array with your Cosmic Energy and Daos. The more chaotic the better."

Ten spikes turned to dozens that embedded themselves in the ground as Kenzie threw them in rapid succession, forming an increasingly large array that soon enough spread even outside the confines of their illusion array. Small spikes shot out between the zombies with pinpoint precision and lodged themselves in the ground.

"These spikes will destabilize the energy flow in the area, making it harder for the shield to feed off the ambient energy. They might even disconnect this section of the barrier from the Unholy Beacons. They will burn out quickly though, so you need to activate the array breaker immediately," she said.

Zac and the others nodded, and cosmic energy was already coursing through Zac's body as he readied himself.

"Go!" Kenzie said the moment she had finalized connecting the inscribed skull with the six spikes that the valkyries controlled.

Zac, Ogras, Kenzie, and Joanna immediately placed their hands on the skull that was as large as an elephant's, and the whole area started to twist and turn as a massive congregation of power started building inside the hollow head. Its eyes started to flicker with chaotic colors as the Daos of the four clashed with increasing ferocity. It even started to vibrate, causing the chains to rattle, but it still seemed like it could swallow more.

Emily was instead dancing around inside the array waving her tomahawks, and Zac realized that his mind felt extremely refreshed. Whatever she was doing was actually dispersing the negative effect of standing inside miasma. It was a lot like [Hatchetman's Spirit] in that regard, as it felt like the inhospitable atmosphere had suddenly turned into something uniquely suited to them.

It helped Zac move his energy with a lot more vigor as an unceasing torrent of energy coursed through his arm and into the inscribed head. He infused the head with his Fragment of the Axe as well, as he felt that Dao Fragment would increase the destructive might the most. In a perfect world, he would have wanted to use all three Fragments, but he simply wasn't able to do that.

The hollow skull was quickly approaching the limits of what it could contain, while the six remaining Valkyries focused on keeping the supportive Array Flags stable. The ground shuddered and heaved by this point, and the Zombies finally realized something was amiss.

There was no way for the illusion array to block out the terrifying amounts of energy they were churning inside as it was affecting the whole area by this point, and the zombies roared as they charged at the source of the disturbance.

"Shield!" Joanna shouted, and six streams of silver Cosmic Energy streamed from the Valkyries and fused to form a sturdy wall surrounding them, using the chitinous shields as a base.

The zombies desperately tried to cut through, but the War Array the Valkyries got from the quest showed it's worth as it didn't even shudder from the onslaught. Of course, these zombies were far from being the elites of the Undead Empire, but there were over a hundred attackers in just a second.

The stalwart shield allowed Zac and the others to wholeheartedly focus on the skull, and it finally rose into the air, stretching all the chains taut.

"Get ready to run!" Kenzie said as she swiped straight at the chains, breaking it in three swift motions.

A piercing screech seemingly from the abyss emerged from the mouth of the skull, and a blinding flame illuminated the sky it exploded into motion. Zac's heart lurched when he saw that the flaming skull actually flew straight into the sky, and he started to worry that the weird treasure would simply fly away. However, his worries were alleviated when Kenzie threw out a flaming spike straight at the closest of the black runes that was twenty meters away from them.

It looked like the skull had found its prey as it immediately did a 180 and shot toward the barrier with extreme momentum. It instantly broke the sound barrier as it flew toward the wall, causing waves of multifarious flames to incinerate everything close to its path, including dozens of zombies.

A terrifying blast spread out the next moment as the flaming skull actually bit into the black fractal, and Zac's eyes lit up when a small crack in the rune appeared in an instant. The crack quickly grew as the flames increased in intensity seemingly without limit, and Zac took a steadying breath as [Verun's Bite] appeared in his right hand.

It was go time.