

The Fall 501

Chapter 501: Death's Embrace

The Lich King was clearly hit by a psychic attack, but he still seemed very much in control of the shield. And while the barrier had dimmed by a certain degree it wasn't to the point that a swing or two would break it.

"I guess we have no choice," Kenzie muttered as drones started appearing above her in rapid succession, each of them independently dodging any errant attack that came too close.

This was the first time Zac had seen his sister control more than one or two of them, and his eyes widened when he saw that she had summoned almost a hundred of them and had them coordinate with perfect precision as they charged up a beam. Something like this would no doubt demand great control even if she was assisted by Jeeves.

If he had a tenth of this skill when controlling his Dao Fragments, then he would be nigh-unstoppable.

The brand of the eye remained on the barrier no matter what the Lich King tried, but he obviously wasn't dismayed to see the appearance of the drones. Zac's brows rose when he saw the arrays on the wall light up as an uncountable number of the same balls floated out to create a second barrier.

They were similar to ones those that had poured out of the Beacons earlier, but Zac' felt some disgust when he noticed there seemed to be screaming faces inside the balls. They only appeared for a second before they were replaced by churning mists, making Zac wonder if his eyes were playing a trick with him.

"These are the souls of your people," the white-clad general laughed to the Lich King's side. "Are you ready to sacrifice them to break our shield? They can still enter the Wheel of Samsara, but not if you destroy them like this."

Zac froze as his eyes widened. Those things were really the souls of former Earthlings? Were the Unholy Beacons of the Undead Empire actually powered by souls? Kenzie paled at the words, but Zac put a hand on her shoulder.

"Keep going, I'll deal with these things. Destroying the balls is the best thing we can do for them. Imagine being trapped by these lunatics forever," Zac said as Cosmic Energy surged to the fractal close to his heart. "Besides, there's no way that E-Grade people are strong enough to affect the afterlife."

Zac at least hoped that was the case.

There was no time to lose. He felt that these things would impede and weaken the strike of the drones, ruining their best option to break inside the fortress. He needed to do something about it, but a couple of [Chop]'s wouldn't be enough. It was a bit of a shame to bring out his big guns early, but it was time to activate [Deforestation].

Zac figured that at least only one of his swings would be wasted on these floating spheres, and his arm grew taut as a huge surge of Cosmic Energy entered the skill fractal. This time he didn't feel any pain or pressure at all, and he immediately swung his axe as he imbued the [Axe of Felling] with his Fragment of the Bodhi.

It wasn't as powerful as his Fragment of the Axe, but that was against normal targets. He wanted to purify these souls and release them to the afterlife if there was such a thing. The Fragment of the Bodhi was no doubt his best chance for accomplishing that.

A green ripple of destruction shot forward, and a deafening wail made Zac stumble for a second. It was the innumerable souls getting cut apart, causing a massive backlash to rush back at Zac. If this had been before, then his soul might have actually cracked like during the climb, but now he only felt a splitting headache as he started running forward.

The way was paved, and Kenzie seized the opportunity to follow through on her end. Heat blared down on Zac as dozens of beams of pure energy passed above him before they tore into the weakened shield, right on top of the blue eye. Cracks immediately spread across the whole barrier as multiple fractals on the wall broke.

The wound quickly started to close though, but a massive torrent of shadows followed the blast, and they wriggled inside the cracks in an instant. A few of the shadows stayed inside the cracks, reminiscent of the scars on Zac's own soul, whereas others continued through the cracks and shot toward the Lich King.

Ogras was obviously not trying to kill him, but rather to divert his attention by forcing him to deal with an attack while controlling the Array. The desiccated Lich was unfortunately a powerful E-Grade warrior, and a swing of his staff was all that was needed to disperse the dozens of shadowy spears.

However, the small delay was all Zac needed as his second swing of [Deforestation] was already in full force, and the [Infernal Axe] unleashed a rampant wave of flames at the weakened barrier. This time he did utilize the Fragment of the Axe, and the splintered shield was quickly cut to ribbons before the wave continued forward into the physical wall.

The flames climbed up the pitch-black fortification, utterly destroying the remaining fractals and ornamental details before it reached the crest of the wall. A large number of the elite soldiers of the Undead Empire were instantly incinerated, but the Lich King quickly prepared a response. An enormous avatar appeared in the sky, a chained-down corpse that spewed an unending stream of green bile from his mouth.

The putrid liquid fell onto the flames of Zac's attack, and a rapid shockwave of noxious gasses shot down in Zac's direction as the green bile was vaporized by the wave of flames. Zac also sensed that his skill was quenched in one move, though it was slightly expended already from breaking the barrier and destroying half the wall.

The cloud rapidly closed in on him and Zac's hairs stood on end as he realized just how potent the toxin was. There was no way that his sister or even Ogras would survive taking a single breath of that stuff.

"Back away!" Zac shouted and was relieved to see Kenzie flashing away to rejoin the others, but he didn't follow his own advice.

The Fragment of the Coffin churned through his body, and he thanked the gods for his recent boost to his Vitality as he rushed through the broken barrier before the Lich King had time to repair it. Even then, he felt extremely weakened for a few seconds, but his heart suddenly thumped with increased vigor.

It was the [Void Heart] that had activated once more, and Zac's heart beat with enough force to cause some ripples in the noxious fumes around him. Of course, it was nothing like the massive effect of the man in the vision, but the poisonous vapors right next to him slowly seeped into his pores and were absorbed into his heart. Zac couldn't worry whether this was a good or a bad thing right now though, as he was in the middle of a battle.

His vision was completely obscured by the extremely dense poison, but he could still spot Death-Attuned hotspots when activating [Cosmic Gaze]. However, he noticed something odd when he looked around. The general stood like a beacon of power on top of the wall walk, but the Lich King standing next to her was barely contained a third of her power.

Had he somehow swapped his real self with a clone the moment Zac lost vision of his target due to the toxic fumes? And where was the original? Zac had planned on taking them all out in one move by unleashing the third swing now that the barrier had been breached, but it looked like that idea was out the window.

It felt a bit of a waste, but he couldn't keep the [Axe of Desolation] on the back-burner for too long. If he didn't use the swing within a minute or activated another skill, then the skill would reset and enter its cooldown period. The last thing he was lacking at the moment was Cosmic Energy reserves, so not using the attack with this many targets in front of him would be a huge waste.

He quickly ran up the wall, using the cracks from his previous strikes as a foothold to reach the crest with a few jumps. The ghost was gone, but the female general immediately launched a swipe with enough power to make Zac's danger sense prickle. A shield appeared on his left arm as his amulet transformed into its defensive form.

The massive swipe was blocked without issue, but it had left a few small marks on the surface of [Love's Bond]. Still, seeing his new Spirit Tool get damaged like that filled Zac with a towering fury as he rushed straight toward the banshee, utterly destroying the clone of the Lich King with a sideswipe, almost as an afterthought.

Zac was in far better control of his emotions now that the Splinter was properly locked up, so he didn't completely give in to his anger. However, that didn't mean he couldn't utilize it, and he channeled his churning killing intent into [True Strike], launching it toward the Undead General's back.

With Zac's amount of accumulated killing intent the skill could barely be considered a feint any longer, but almost a compulsion. It probably felt like a D-Grade Hegemon was bearing down on her from behind, and the general couldn't ignore it just as expected. She quickly turned around to meet the attack as a shimmering shield appeared to block out Zac, but nothing met her furious swipe toward the rear.

The general immediately understood she had been duped, but she didn't have time to retreat before she was slammed in the face with a shield-bash powered by 2000 Strength and rage. A crunching sound echoed out as she was thrown back like a ragdoll, black ichor spewing in every direction.

Zac couldn't activate [Loamwalker] at the moment, but the wall collapsed beneath his feet as he pushed forward to catch up to her flying form, and [Verun's Bite] keened as a Bodhi-infused swingripped

through the air. The general unfortunately had enough mental presence to desperately block the swing with her claws.

However, she couldn't match Zac's power output at all and was flung toward the inner section of the fortress with a wail of pain, four of her fingers cleanly cut off. Her bad luck wasn't ending there though. The coffin shield quickly returned to its necklace form while Zac growled as he swung [Verun's Bite] in a wide arc toward the general. A massive half-moon of death spread out as the final swing of [Deforestation] had activated.

Zac figured that if he couldn't locate the Lich King, then he might as well just destroy everything.

There was no need to even use [Hatchetman's Rage] to activate the third swing it this time, his evolved physique more than enough to handle the massive strain. A coruscating wave of destruction ripped into the inner structures of the fortress, causing a chain reaction of buildings collapsing. The ground shuddered as almost a third of the fortress was leveled with one attack.

A series of interlocking shields in front of the Miasma Towers eventually managed to exhaust the energy of the strike, but the ground still shook for a few seconds as a few structurally unsound parts of the fortress collapsed. A shocking surge of cosmic energy entered his body as the [Axe of Desolation] no doubt killed hundreds of the undead who were staying inside the buildings he destroyed, and he immediately directed it toward the node he located earlier.

He dispatched the few Revenants foolish enough to actually attack him before he turned his sight inward for a second. He had started feeling some discomfort in his Node when he kept infusing it with energy, and it even resisted his attempts at pushing more of his accumulated energies inside.

He wanted to see if it was ready to burst open, but was quickly disappointed. The node looked pretty much the same as before, apart from there being a decent amount of energies swirling about beneath the surface. Even more Cosmic Energy was needed it seemed, and he tried instilling some of his left-over kill energy again.

This time it worked, but he really had to cram it inside. It felt like the node was completely full, and he was currently increasing the pressure inside by forcibly instilling more Cosmic Energy. The pain was gradually increasing, but Zac sighed in relief when the pain abated a few seconds after the last of his surplus energy had been pushed inside.

Just how much energy would be needed was something he would have to worry about later as bursting nodes mid-battle seemed like a spectacularly stupid idea. He instead activated [Cosmic Gaze] again as he looked around for his next target. The Incursion was still very much active, which meant that the Lich King still hadn't left Earth even after Zac had made his way inside.

That meant he was currently hiding somewhere in the area, most likely protecting the core of the realignment array. The ghost was nowhere to be seen as well, and Zac didn't remember killing it. However, that was of lesser concern as it didn't seem to be a combat-oriented cultivator. Perhaps he was the strategist of the invasion or something.

However, Zac frowned in annoyance when he noticed that the other general was still alive as well. She had probably managed to flicker away just in time to avoid getting engulfed in the wave of desolation, and was now standing on top of one of the Array Towers.

Her face was completely disfigured and black ichor stained her dress, and her aura was clearly a bit unstable. She touched an array atop the tower before she floated down again. Zac saw her running further into the fortress before slinking inside a massive palatial section that was built on top of the roof of a more common-looking barrack.

He was just about to go after her, but he sensed a presence to his right.

"You go find the boss," Ogras said as his eyes were trained on the fleeing form of the undead general. "I'll deal with that one. I want to see what she has prepared inside her own lair."

"What about the others?" Zac hesitantly asked. "There might be more of the ghosts."

"They can keep the trash at bay for hours if need be," the demon shrugged. "And your sister has erected some anti-ghost array. If my clan had someone half as talented in formations as that girl back home, we wouldn't just be a bottom-feeding clan at the edge of our planet."

Zac nodded in agreement, but his eyes widened in alarm when he saw the surviving towers all light as one. It looked like the undead planned on unleashing everything in one massive blast before Zac dismantled the rest of the forest.

"Run!" Ogras screamed as he was swallowed by shadows, but Zac shrugged off the demon's attempts at bringing him along.

Instead, he instructed [Love's Bond] to retake its defensive form, and he unhesitantly activated the circular fractal on its lid. This was the first time Zac actually activated one of the two skills, this one called [Death's Embrace].

The whole coffin shook as the chains that held the lid shut twisted and moved until a small opening appeared. A dense black cloud spread out and rose into the air until it formed a massive torso, making it look like he had summoned a genie. But Zac's heart was still thrown into chaos as it was no ordinary elemental that had appeared.

It was Alea.