

The Fall 506

Chapter 506: Triv

Zac woke up with a start, his head a chaotic mess, but he instinctively shot to his feet with his weapon at the ready. He barely had time to stop himself from bisecting a shocked Valkyrie before he remembered where he was.

"Sorry about that. How long was I out?" Zac asked with a hoarse voice.

"Around forty minutes," Kenzie said with worry. "What's wrong? Are you poisoned?"

"It's nothing," Zac said as he rubbed his temples. "I broke open a Node by force earlier because of all the energy I gained. I think I overextended myself a bit."

"I completely forgot after seeing you zip around as usual. I'm surprised you could fight like that at all," Ogras said, his eyes wide. "I guess that even the Heavens has finally had enough of your luck and sent some cultists in your direction. Karma always comes knocking sooner or later."

Zac turned his sight inward, and he was a bit better than before. His pathways were still a mess, but his flesh was on the mend already. He guessed that he had fallen unconscious because he had used his pathways when he should have been resting. It was a valuable experience though, learning what kind of effect exploding a node had on his body and combat readiness.

But the node wasn't the only problem that ailed his body at the moment. He thought a second before he walked a few steps away, and shocked exclamations echoed across the hill as he stabbed himself in his arm. A large spurt of blood stained the ground, but the wound quickly scabbed over.

"Don't worry, just expelling some toxins," Zac said as he took out his flying treasure. "I feel a lot better already. Get ready. I'll check out the situation around the pillar for threats before we deal with the realignment array."

Zac really did feel a lot better after having exsanguinated himself. [Void Heart] had absorbed both a bunch of miasma and poisons during the fight, and having been bled a few times helped him get some of the impurities out. He still would have preferred to rest up some more, but there was still the aftermath of the invasion to deal with. He gingerly tried activating the flying treasure again, and this time it went smoothly.

He soon closed in on the azure pillar and he actually saw a familiar figure fretting back and forth some distance away from it, the ghost who had hovered right next to the Lich King earlier. It looked unsure whether to enter or not. However, the moment it spotted Zac its visage turned even ghastlier and became marred with horror, and it immediately shot toward the Nexus Hub.

The ghost wasn't all that quick though, especially not compared to a top-tier flying treasure like Zac's. Just a second after the ghost spotted him he had been caught, held firmly in Zac's grasp. A few Revenants were overseeing the zombies as well, but they unhesitantly jumped into the teleportation array, abandoning their colleague.

"Who are you?" Zac asked as he shook the ghost for a bit.

"Sir, I am just an attendant to Lord Ad- ah, I mean the Wretched Lich Adriel. A thousand blessings upon you for freeing me!" he hurriedly said. "Please spare this useless one, I am not a threat to you or your planet. I am just a custodian, a non-combat class ordered to come to this planet against his wishes."

"Shameless enough," Zac snorted. "What's going on here?"

"We're bringing back the children," the ghost explained, not hesitating to spill the beans. "They will have a better future coming with us than staying here, and it will rid your planet of these walking Holy Beacons."

Zac frowned as he looked at the zombies who mindlessly shuffled forward until they disappeared into the Incursion Pillar. Perhaps the ghost was right. The death-attunement should dissipate sooner or later, and what would become of these people?

Some might turn sapient and find themselves stuck on a planet with a hostile environment full of enemies. But most would simply be cut down by cultivators gathering Nexus Coins and Cosmic Energy. At the Undead Kingdom, they would at least have a chance to be born anew.

"...Fine, I'll let them go. Now, tell me how to turn off the Realignment Array," Zac said.

This was the most pressing issue now. The quest to stop the realignment still hadn't completed. He had actually noticed that the massive lines in the sky had started to fade while he hunted the cultists, but it seemingly wasn't enough. The most likely suspect was obviously the array below the surface, but he still believed that having this attendant to turn it off the safest bet.

But his hopes were quickly dashed as the ghost frantically shook his head.

"I can't!" the ghost cried. "I would love to explain to the young master, but I can't."

"The first directive?" Zac asked with a frown.

"Yes, yes! You are very well-read. The first directive precludes me from helping you no matter my personal wish to assist!" the ghost nodded.

Zac frowned as his eyes bore into the squirming specter. Catheya had never really explained exactly how binding the commandments were, but they didn't seem like complete compulsions to Zac. There should be some wriggle-room, and Zac felt he might as well do some name-dropping to see if the Draugr girl could help him one last time.

"I recently became friends with Catheya Sharva'Zi from the Empire Heartlands when I visited the Tower of Eternity. It appears she is visiting your Kingdom while her master is in secluded cultivation?" Zac said as he took out the Teleportation Token she gave him before he flashed his Tower Title. "She gave me this token, you might recognize it."

"This! Ninth Floor! And you know that Exalted Mistress?" the ghost veritably screamed as its incorporeal eyes darted back and forth between the title and the token.

Catheya actually hadn't given him a Token representing her force, but he was willing to bet that some random ghost wouldn't know the difference. For all it knew, it might very well be a teleportation token leading straight to the Empire Heartlands rather than the Twilight Harbor.

"I can put in a good word for you next time I meet her, or I can do the opposite," Zac shrugged. "I will turn off the Realignment array sooner or later even if I have to rip this whole Fortress apart. I don't mind turning you into a pile of ghost dust first though."

The ghost sputtered for a few seconds until it calmed down.

"Did you know that the attunement of a planet is based on its World Core? It is a magical crystal residing in the deepest core of a world. Some believe that a world core is essentially alive, and the planet's attunement a result of its cultivation where it absorbs the energy of The Cosmos. What do you think would happen if such a core was flooded with Death while it was sealed off from the cosmos?" the ghost said before it dimmed as though it was wounded.

Zac's eyes widened as he looked at the wretched appearance of the ghost. Was it actually wounded from divulging some information like that? However, it still hadn't answered his question, at least not straight out. Most of what it said was just general information and theories, and nothing that he wouldn't be able to piece together himself.

However, Zac obviously understood the implied meaning behind the ghost's words.

"The array in the sky was just blocking out the cosmos," Zac muttered before he looked down at the ground.

It seemed as though the people of earth had gotten things a bit backward. If Zac had understood the ghost's explanation correctly. The enormous array in the sky wasn't actually the realignment array. It was at best half of it responsible for isolating the planet from the universe, preventing it from absorbing normal energy. The real realignment was taking place underground.

Both parts were important to stop, but the most important might be whatever was going on in that underground chamber. It looked like he would have to bring his sister, after all. Catching other undead wouldn't do him any good either, as they no doubt would be implicated by the same compulsions.

"You'll be coming with me for a bit," Zac said to the ghost as [Love's Bond] transformed into a coffin on his back.

The next moment four chains wrapped around the screeching ghost, each of them imbued with the Fragment of the Bodhi. One twist would rip the hostage apart if he tried anything, but it looked unlikely judging by how weak it felt. Zac still kept his eyes on the ghost as they flew back to his group to pick up his sister.

Ogras might be helpful as well, but he seemed pretty wrung out. Zac left him on the hill instead so that he could protect the group while he recuperated. After all, there was still one Undead General on the loose who could appear at any moment.

"What's this?" Kenzie asked as she curiously looked at the captured ghost.

"Young Master, you should not mix with the forces of the Boundless Path," the ghost said, pointedly ignoring Kenzie. "Living or Dead, we still follow Heaven's Path. Consorting with heretics will only lead to a lifetime of suffering."

"She's not a Technocrat. She's my sister," Zac snorted. "I just closed a Technocrat Incursion and picked up some tools that are helpful until we've grown stronger. And you talk pretty big after almost having killed our planet."

"A thousand apologies, mistress!" the ghost exclaimed, his attitude taking a dramatic turn. "This humble one is called Triv, I worked as a caretaker of the previous lord of this manor."

Zac suddenly realized that the ghost would be a pretty good source of knowledge. It obviously wouldn't be as knowledgeable as someone like Catheya, but he was still the right-hand-man to the Lich King. He should have listened in on all sorts of conversations and had free access to a lot of intelligence.

Perhaps keeping him on Earth wouldn't be such a bad idea, provided he could be controlled.

"I thought he might be useful in turning off the realignment array," Zac added. "It is obviously still going since the quest hasn't completed."

"But the massive arrays in the sky seems to be weakening," Kenzie skeptically said. "They should clear up in another hour or two."

Zac quickly recounted his experiences below ground as they reached the entrance to the hidden subterranean chamber. The group jumped down as one, but Kenzie immediately fell over, completely pale and shuddering. Only then did Zac remember the extremely dense death attunement in the air.

It wasn't too bad for him now that the Lich King wasn't there to amplify the effect, but someone like Kenzie was clearly worse off. He quickly handed her an E-Grade Divine crystal as he spread out his Dao Field for the Fragment of the Bodhi. It helped alleviate her symptoms, but it also made the ghost scream in pain until Zac moved the chains out of the field.

"Thank you," Kenzie said with a hoarse voice. "That was pretty scary."

"No problem," Zac said with a smile as he looked around. "What do you think?"

"These things are part of one array. I think the condensed death energy in here is just an after-effect. Kind of like radiation in a power plant or something," she muttered as she looked around, her eyes flashing in red a few seconds before they dimmed again.

"How do we turn this thing off?" Zac asked.

Kenzie walked over to the closest pillar, and she went over every line for a few minutes. They also tried to go over the mysterious core, but they couldn't even get close before the aura of death became too overpowering.

"I think we can deactivate the pillars if we make our way from the outside," she hesitantly said. "We'll leave the core for last."

Zac nodded as they moved to the edge of the chamber, where Kenzie started breaking a few inscription lines that connected the pillar with the dense runes on the floor. Zac helped out by ripping crystal after crystal out of the sockets, rapidly expanding his stockpile of Miasma Crystals. They spent the next hour going back and forth, where Zac essentially acted as a mobile counterforce to the death attunement in the air.

However, even he was starting to grow tired as it was a constant drain on his mental energy to keep his Dao Field active in this environment. Zac initially wanted to start smashing pillars, but Kenzie was afraid that would cause a massive final discharge of death energies that might hurt the World Core.

But Kenzie got more and more skilled at turning off the pillars, and soon enough they had all dimmed down, leaving just the pedestal. It emitted a terrifying amount of death-attuned energy even though the pillars were all turned off. The energy clearly came from the rock. It was pitch-black and polished smooth, making it almost look like an egg.

The egg emitted mysterious fluctuations as well, and Zac frowned when he realized that it rendered his Dao Field utterly useless. Kenzie couldn't get close to it at all, and they had to retreat after a short while.

"What is that thing?" Zac asked with a frown as he turned to the ghost who was still chained up. "And don't tell me you don't know."

"I'm not exactly sure what it is," the ghost said. "They are called Seeds of Uneath. Our kingdom receives them from the Empire along with this array."

"Like a realignment kit?" Zac asked.

"Precisely," the ghost nodded. "Even small Kingdoms such as ours can obviously convert a planet on our own, but our means require high-graded items that are impossible to bring through an Incursion. But the empire provides these things as a sol-."

It didn't get any further though before massive convulsions wracked its intangible form. Zac sighed in annoyance, as it looked like they couldn't get anything more out of the ghost without it exploding for breaking the commandments.

"So, now tell me. Why shouldn't I kill you now that we know everything?" Zac asked as his eyes bore into the translucent orbs of the ghost.