

## The Fall 509

### Chapter 509: Challenge

Zac had just lamented that him using the Bloodline Marrow by itself would be a bit wasteful, and now this opportunity presented itself? What if he could find something to bring out the most of the marrow and guarantee that his bloodline could awaken?

"Perhaps we can find things to strengthen the people of Port Atwood," Kenzie exclaimed, echoing Zac's thoughts. "There might be bloodline manuals or elixirs stashed inside the Mystic Realm. Perhaps even things to open Hidden nodes."

"There are also werewolves and god knows what else in there according to Ogras," Zac said to calm his sister down before he turned to Triv. "Do you have any proof of this theory?"

"Young master, I don't. But we are quite good judges of the quality of bodies, and as far as we can tell, the inhabitants of this planet aren't natural," Triv said.

"That's impossible though. We have mapped our evolution for millions of years," Zac countered, though the words of his mother's projection echoed in the back of his head.

According to her, she was surprised to find Earth inhabited at all when she arrived.

"Yes, this planet has a natural seed of life, but many heritages do not belong here," Triv conceded. "I personally believe that some accident happened inside that Mystic Realm a few thousand years ago. The owners left, and a group of test subjects managed to break free and ended up on this planet."

Zac quickly understood what would happen next if what the ghost said was true. Those escapees would find themselves on an unintegrated planet utterly devoid of cosmic energy. They would be like castaways, unable to become stronger, and unable to leave. Their children wouldn't have any chance to become cultivators, but their bloodlines would still be passed on.

Was this the source of Billy's golden blood? And was it perhaps even the source of his own bloodline? He had figured that it came from his mother, but perhaps that was completely wrong. Perhaps his [Void Heart] came from someone who had fled the Mystic Realm thousands of years ago.

"What kind of experiments do you think would take place in such a hidden base?" Zac asked.

"We believed it was related to some boundless faction, they're always up to something. Perhaps they wanted to create a new bloodline suited to their needs, using other bloodlines as a base. Perhaps they wanted to evolve bloodlines and sell the results to wealthy families. It is impossible to tell without gaining access to the research data," the ghost said.

"The Undead Incursion was after the Mystic Realm as well, and so are the cultists," Kenzie added.

"I know," Zac nodded.

Void's Disciple had said as much when they met, and the invaders had pretty much confirmed it by sailing toward his Mystic Realm entrance even after failing their attack on Port Atwood. He still didn't know what was so alluring about that place, but it might contain some treasure valuable enough to cause waves in the whole Zecia sector.

"Well, did you know that the Church of Everlasting Dao already controls three different portals that all lead to our Mystic Realm," Kenzie said. "According to Triv, at least."

"How come you're so talkative all of a sudden?" Zac asked skeptically. "You almost exploded last time I tried to have you divulge some minor secrets."

"This matter regarding bloodlines was a welcome surprise, but it's not related to the goal of the Undead Empire," Triv explained, this time taking a spiritual hit.

"So you were after something else," Zac said.

"Yes," the ghost croaked, further wounding himself.

"What was it?" Zac muttered curiously, but he hurriedly corrected himself when he saw that Triv was starting to shake and expand. "Wait, don't answer that!"

But he was still extremely curious about what could elicit such a response. Two major factions and the Dominators were all gunning toward that item, yet he was somehow still kept out of the loop.

"Julia might be able to find out more," Kenzie said, seemingly reading his thoughts.

"What? Julia?" Zac repeated with confusion "How would that be possible?"

The former government official had simply stayed on the island since jumping onto the teleporter with him, sometimes assisting with diplomatic issues with the Marshall Clan. How would she know something that he didn't about the mystic realm?

"The New World Government actually performed an all-out assault on one of the cultists' bases and killed one of their Generals. That's how they got access to the mystic realm and started the 'Ark World' project," Kenzie explained. "They should have found out a few things if they're taking such drastic measures."

"The one time that little faction showed some spine," the ghost muttered from the side. "The humans of this planet are wholly unimpressive. If it wasn't for young master and the many bloodlines running around, then this world would be completely worthless."

"So you're saying I should send out Julia as a spy? I doubt she will be able to return to her position after these months," Zac said, ignoring the ghost.

"She should still have some contacts who would want to make a connection with you, especially now that the Undead Incursion is dealt with," Kenzie explained.

"I'll talk with her when we get back," Zac nodded before he turned to the ghost.

However, Zac couldn't help but feel himself being dragged against his will once more as he thought about the Mystic Realm, just like when the System had placed him in front of the two remnants. It seemed like he really didn't have a choice but to explore its depths this time either. All his enemies would be there, and it was related to his family to do with his family. The mystic realm was his best bet at figuring out whether Leandra was a friend or a foe.

And now it might even help him with his constitution?

Him having some sort of bloodline was pretty much confirmed from getting the odd Hidden Node [Void Heart]. If it was based on some previous captive, then there might actually be more information and even a manual waiting for him inside the Mystic Realm. After all, he wanted to maintain his above-average power, and opening additional Hidden Nodes was one of the best available methods in the E-Grade.

Just like the F-grade was the best opportunity to farm Titles, the E-Grade was the best opportunity to open up nodes that might benefit him for the rest of his life. Every grade was like that as far as Zac understood. He wasn't sure about how the higher grades worked, but it seemed like D-Grade was the only rank where you could perfect your Cultivator Core.

"What else do you know about the Mystic Realm?" Zac asked Triv.

"Not much," the ghost said, but he hurriedly explained after getting a glare from Zac. "The scant intelligence we had was based on spying on the Cultists and capturing a few of their warriors. We were focused on the realignment. As long as it completed the planet would be ours, including the Mystic Realm."

Zac asked a few more questions, but he soon realized there was not much else that the butler could divulge between lack of first-hand information and the compulsions. Hopefully, he'd be able to gain more information through Julia. Of course, by this point he could probably just fly over to New Washington and demand answers from Thomas Fischer.

Seeing that the teleporter was up and running was a relief, but there was one more thing that Zac wanted to take care of before he left this place.

"Take me to the residence Mhal used before I killed him," Zac said as he turned to Mhal.

"It was you?" Triv blurted with surprise as he led the way. "We figured it was the Monks."

Zac only shrugged in response as he ushered the ghost out of the warehouse. The fortress was only so big, and they soon reached a structure, or at least the ruins of one. The above-ground manor had been completely destroyed from the battle, but the ghost informed him that there was a large underground compound as well after it activated some sort of ocular skill.

A quick search led him to a reinforced steel hatch in the ground. But a physical barrier was no match for Zac who simply ripped the thick metal plate out of its hinges. However, he immediately regretted his action as a rancid odor immediately rose from the dark hole. It was so bad that he nearly swapped over to his Draugr-form to avoid keeling over.

"What is this stench?" Zac blanched.

"Mhal performed quite a few experiments in his spare time. I believe he tried to find a suitable upgrade for his current constitution. Corpse Lords are usually like that, obsessed with their bodies. Better to discard the body entirely, if you ask me. You become a bit weaker, but you only need to focus on one type of improvement," Triv said as it looked down at the tunnel with some disdain.

"I found a notebook on his body after I defeated him. He brought something valuable to this place, something that he hid from you and the Lich King. He was instructed by his clan to experiment on this planet, away from prying eyes." Zac said. "I need to find it."

"He did?" Triv said with surprise. "He never struck me or Lord Adriel as the clever type, but rather a brute. But perhaps that was exactly what he wanted."

Zac quickly found the source of the stench as he walked down a set of stairs. Three massive holding cells were filled with dismembered bodies in various states of decay. There were a handful of zombies as well who desperately charged at the bars when they sensed him. Zac made short work of them all before he threw out a massive amount of corpse destroying powder.

It alleviated the smell a bit, but Zac still worked at maximum efficiency to look for the hidden Draugr samples. Triv was flying straight through walls and the ground in search of hidden compartments as well, eager to prove its worth.

"Young master, over here," Triv said a while later as he rose from the floor. "How curious, I couldn't sense anything at all until I hit a barrier. It really seems like this little vassal force was keeping a lot of secrets. Are they planning a rebellion?"

"That doesn't have anything to do with you, remember?" Zac snorted as he walked over. "You're an Earthling now."

"Of course, of course," the ghost hurriedly nodded. "But the young master should know that returning to the embrace of the Empire is the only way for a pure-blood Draugr to realize his full potential."

"How do you know I'm pure-blood?" Zac asked with some curiosity as he started digging up the ground.

"I cannot be certain, but your bloodline is certainly a lot stronger than anything I've encountered before. And it feels... Old. That's how it feels with the ancient clans of the Heartlands, I'm told," the ghost hesitantly said. "If I may, why cling to your human form at all if you have the chance to discard it? You even have the opportunity to awaken without losing your sense of self, something that is usually extremely difficult to achieve."

"Well, being human doesn't seem so glamorous to you, perhaps, but I like it," Zac muttered, his eyes trained at the box he had unearthed.

Zac hesitated about what to do for a few seconds as he looked down at the pitch-black container. He could sense that this truly was what he was looking for, as there was a slight resonance between his Specialty Core and the box. But what now? Were the samples of his bloodline any use to him any longer?

He eventually stashed away the box without opening it, much to Triv's disappointment. Zac was afraid that there were traps in the chest itself that would break the samples inside. Who knew, they might become useful for upgrading his Specialty core in the future? He had the System to help him out for the first evolution, but next time he might not be so lucky.

There was nothing else of interest in the chamber, and Zac quickly returned to the surface, the stale air feeling like a fresh gust after that rancid environment. If there had been any lingering feelings of pity for the Corpse Lord's Clan before due to the letter he read, then that pity had been utterly quashed after seeing the aftermath of Mhal's experimentation.

In either case, there was not much left to do in the Dead Zone, and Zac prepared to get going. However, he realized that the ghost presented a problem as he returned to his sister's side.

"Is there any way you can hide?" Zac asked as he turned to the ghost who kept pace two steps behind. "I can't be bringing you around in the open. I already have enough people talking behind my back from working with the demons."

"Here," the ghost said as he produced a small black tower no larger than three centimeters in height. "I can stay inside this, as long as young master don't put it into a Spatial Treasure. With your permission, I'll rest for a few days as my soul is wounded. If you need me, just call by nudging the mark in your mind."

Zac nodded and the ghost disappeared the next moment as the small tower started giving off a weak azure light. Zac curiously looked at the thing, but he couldn't figure out if it was a Spatial Treasure or if the ghost could actually shrink itself to such a diminutive size.

"I don't understand why you don't just kill that thing," Ogras muttered with disgust as he stepped out of the shadows. "Nothing good will come from keeping that one."

"I'll destroy any Karmic Ties he might carry later," Zac said. "I have the lamp now."

"Karmic Ties is just one of the many dangers in the Multiverse," Ogras shrugged. "Another one is consorting with the unliving. It usually ends with you joining them."

"A bit late for that," Zac snorted, which elicited a laugh from Kenzie as she fiddled with her new inscription tool.

"One of them playing with ghosts, the other with Technocrat toys. You two siblings are truly testing the limits," the demon muttered. "You better pray the Ruthless Heavens don't take you up on your challenge."