

The Fall 840

Chapter 840: A Storm Descends

Ra'Klid inwardly shuddered as the main gates of Fort Atwood swung open like the gates to the abyss, his 180 points in Luck telling him that lethal danger had descended upon this place. Budding trepidation rapidly transitioned into a primal fear as an aura of ultimate suppression blasted out from the interiors of the fort, absolutely drowning the whole courtyard in an instant.

For a moment, Ra'Klid felt as though he was back on the Southbend Steppes before the Integration, just an unproven warrior with five hundred He'Ruk Blooddancers bearing down on him atop their raptors. The feeling of being outmatched and outnumbered, of fear leaking through his pores from the impending doom.

He wasn't the only one who felt the change in the winds of war – how could you miss it? Fighting rapidly abated, with even Peak E-grade warriors struggling to simply stay upright from the storm of killing intent that unceasingly kept flooding the courtyard, a single source overwhelming thousands of veteran warriors.

What kind of monster was approaching? Who could emit such an aura of savagery and how many deaths must they have on their conscience?

A few flashes of light ripped through the air next, and the previously unbreakable runes conjured by the unholy ones crumbled into nothingness. Just like that, the only thing protecting the ghosts from the terrifying fortification of these outsiders had failed, but Ra'Klid barely registered as the runes on his scales hummed with delight.

"True Divinity," the shaman whispered with ardent fervor shimmering in his eyes, and they both turned toward the source of both the aura of terror and the Dao of their origin.

It was a human male who came walking through the main gates of the fort, wearing a warrior's robe in the same colors as the banners of these otherworlders. His appearance wasn't anything special, except for being slightly more rugged than his thinner brethren. But while his appearance was average, his aura was not.

The air twisted around him as he walked, unable to contain the force of his conviction. It almost felt like the chaotic and impure energies of the Ensolus Continent were welcoming its sovereign, and a storm was rapidly kicking up in the sky. He was not doing anything after that initial salvo, yet he had somehow become the center point of the whole fort, his presence demanding the leaders' full attention.

The pressure of staring down into the furious and Paka-addled eyes of his father in the Circle of Challenge was nothing compared to what he felt from standing in front of this man. Ra'Klid felt his own conviction falter as the man came closer, each step of his feeling like a hammer against his heart. Even though the human carried the aura of divinity, it felt different, and Ra'Klid even started wondering if they were on the wrong path.

"Breathe," the old warrior to his side whispered, though Ra'Klid could see he was gripping his axe so deeply his claws had dug into his palm, causing tiny droplets of blood to fall on the ground.

Ra'Klid surreptitiously nodded in thanks to his old mentor and turned back toward the human who could be none other than Lord Atwood, the Deviant Asura who many presumed dead after being missing for years. They thought him just a mayfly, a burst of magnificence followed by irrelevance.

Foolish.

After the Soulbright Witch had proclaimed herself a follower of the Deviant Asura years ago, Ra'Klid and his confidantes had done everything in their might to gather all the intelligence they could. Even then, the recordings of his fight in front of the Tower of Eternity were nothing compared to being put face-to-face with the man.

The man in the recordings had essentially been a beast – powerful and unpredictable, lashing out at his surroundings. But the man in front of him was a true warrior, every movement perfectly in tune with the Heavens themselves. It even felt like the Deviant Asura had transcended the fabled Divine Warriors of legend, the hallowed masters whose strikes contained the will and faith of their whole tribe.

It might even surpass those legendary existences, transcending the most revered experts in Mavai History. How was it possible? How could someone improve to such a degree in a few short years? The Divine Warriors only reached their level after centuries of tempering, allowing them a few short decades of supremacy before their aging bodies failed to match their skill.

Was this what a peak genius in this so-called Zecia Sector looked like?

In one of his hands, the Deviant Asura held a beautifully crafted bone axe that told a story of blood and glory, instilled with a power that resonated with the very core of the Mavai. It was the same weapon as the one in the recordings, yet it seemed to have undergone almost as great a transformation as his master.

Yet Ra'Klid barely spared the weapon a glance, even if it was a treasure that would have made him drool in normal situations. As shocking as the axe was, it was nothing compared to what the man held in his other hand.

The old bastard Eomid.

The Ghost King was furiously struggling, yet the vise-like grip around his throat effortlessly locked him in place. Not only that, but some sort of plant had bound the spectral warrior as well, seemingly completely unbothered by the fact the warrior was an intangible spirit.

"My king!" Kantasta, the right-hand man of Eomid, screamed, and he turned into a river of blades as he rushed toward the Deviant Asura.

The man barely spared him a glance, his axe drawing a lazy arc that made Ra'Klid's hair stand on end.

"Perfection!" Mondrik gasped, and Ra'Klid had to agree with his teacher.

He had never seen such a beautiful strike. It was simple, yet it was sublime, and Kantasta barely managed to avoid getting cut in two. It had barely contained any energy, yet it had exhausted all of a Peak E-grade warrior's momentum. This was perfection, creating miracles with the smallest of movement, a world in one's hand.

The ghost understood it was outmatched, and it immediately conjured a scimitar-wielding apparition above his head, most likely his ultimate skill. However, it was futile. With a small step and a follow-up strike flowing as smooth as water, the elite assassin was cut down as though he was a redback sog bred for slaughter.

Seeing his confidante being killed prompted another serious burst of resistance,

"It failed!" Eomid croaked.

"And now the price has to be paid," Lord Atwood sighed.

"Wait!" the ghost screamed. "We can--"

But there was no waiting and no mercy with the Deviant Asura. Eomid should have understood as much after feeling the terrifying storm of blood that was ingrained in the man's aura. Even then, Ra'Klid's eyes turned to saucers as the powerful Ancestral Ghost was ripped apart as though he was made from brittlegrass, only his Cultivator's Core remaining. The core entered the man's Spatial Treasure, while the rest of his body started dissipating.

It was obviously not just raw Strength, though Ra'Klid knew the man had more than enough to spare. It was a level of Dao that perhaps only the Soulbright Witch could match on this world. A flood of pure life had stormed into Eomid's intangible body, overwhelming his defenses and effectively shredding his soul.

Just like that, one of the peak warriors of this world had fallen in such an ignoble manner.

In their plans to take out Eomid, Mondrik had estimated that at least three councilors would have to sacrifice their lives, yet the Deviant Asura had ended him like it was nothing. How was this possible? Even if he had managed to enter the D-grade since disappearing, the difference shouldn't be this big.

He had no answer to that mystery, but he could only thank the lucky stars he listened to Mondrik's and Vakra's advice to stay neutral in case either of the opposing sides made a move during this meeting. What if the Mavai actually joined the unholy ones in an attempt to take out the Soulbright Witch? It might have been him being ripped apart just now instead of Eomid.

"You know who I am, this insurrection ends now. Anyone who doesn't comply will die, and their whole race will be implicated," The Deviant Asura's said, his voice empowered by a killing intent that sent shivers down Ra'Klid's spine.

Ra'Klid almost hoped the unclean ones had some more cards up their sleeves, allowing the Mavai to get a better picture of the man who had become a legend in the Base Town of the Tower of Eternity. Unfortunately, the cowardly ghosts seemed to have lost all their fighting will upon seeing the Ghost King getting torn apart.

"Mercy! We surrender!" Aouvi shrieked as he fell to his knees, and Carva immediately followed suit, meaning all three of the Ghost Kings had either died or surrendered by now.

A moment later, every single ghost in the courtyard was kneeling, waiting on the judgment of the axeman. Ra'Klid's eyes glimmered as he looked at the scene, his mind briefly turning to his father, drunk and belligerent as he shouted at his harem, believing he had been at the peak of the world. Ra'Klid shook his head.

If the Mavai wanted to survive in this world where monsters like the Deviant Asura walked the lands, they needed to adapt.

The previously chaotic courtyard was so quiet that you could hear a pin drop as Zac looked at the sea of kneeling specters, the air around him still flickering from the ripped-apart wraith. He was shocked at how quickly these guys gave in, his eyes even thinning in suspicion they were planning something else.

Still, he couldn't believe his luck.

He had planned on being present for the summit mentioned in the reports just in case, though in hiding so that he could observe both the performance of his people and the response of these natives. Unfortunately, his trip to the Underworld had taken longer than expected, making him run a couple of minutes late.

However, he didn't expect things to go south so quickly, even though the missive had mentioned the risk of things falling through was quite high. Zac wasn't surprised, considering the reward Vilari could choose upon conquering this planet – to completely drain this world's World Core and use the energy to push Earth to Middle E-grade.

How could anyone feel confident about surrendering in such a situation?

Even then, he hadn't expected to run into one of the ghosts, a D-grade one at that, the moment he appeared on the Ensolus continent. He had somehow made it all the way to the teleportation room and was trying to tamper with the Nexus Hub using some foreign contraption. Luckily, the ghost had been just as surprised as Zac when he appeared, allowing Zac to thwart the attempt and capture the man in one go.

Honestly, things went a lot smoother than Zac could ever expect, considering the man was a Hegemon. The ghost didn't even have a chance to activate a single skill before he was bound by Vivi and flooded with the Branch of the Kalpataru, completely disrupting his energy flow. At first, Zac thought his training in the Orom World had made him even stronger than he realized, but he soon understood the real reason after he felt the ghost's attempts at breaking free.

The ghost's stores of Miasma were far greater than Zac's own reserves, but he was not able to use a huge amount of it at any given moment. Either his foundations were damaged, or he had not properly recovered from forcing a breakthrough. Because there was no way he had reached Hegemony the normal way.

After all, the ghost was only supported by two Middle Stage Dao Fragments. He must have forcibly pushed himself into the D-grade using some sort of unorthodox means or by eating some treasure that had appeared on this newly integrated world.

Becoming even a weak Hegemon would normally be enough to deal with most E-grade elites as long as you had the right tools, but it wasn't enough to deal with someone like Zac. Perhaps if the ghost had a high-quality War Regalia or the time to gain a couple of levels it'd have been a different story, but this ghost wasn't even a match to Aia Ouro, Hegemon or not.

Let alone to Zac himself, who sported a trio of Dao Branches and a slew of titles to boost his attributes far beyond the norm of a Peak E-grade cultivator.

Now, the question was how to deal with these natives. He had read the thoughts and motivations behind Vilari's and Joanna's plans for the Ensolus Continent and this World, giving him some insights that not even his elite soldiers had. However, there were also a lot of things he didn't have a complete grasp on. He guessed that he would have to play things by the ear.

A flash of golden light, and Joanna decked in golden armor appeared before him, joined by a squad of nine other Valkyries who all were somewhat familiar to him.

"You're back," Joanna breathed, her eyes practically sparkling. "We knew you'd make it."

"I'm back," Zac smiled. "I'm sorry it took so long."

"As long as you-" Joanna started, but a sudden wail disrupted the quiet that had gripped the courtyard.

Zac frowned and looked over, seeing it was one of his guards who had collapsed on the ground, tightly grasping the rune that had appeared on her forehead. A few warriors rushed over, but they weren't sure whether to help or execute the guard screaming at the top of her lungs.

"What have you done to my people?" Zac frowned as he turned to the two remaining D-grade ghosts.

"Alive!" the ghost said. "They're all alive!"

"What?" Zac frowned as he looked at the unmoving bodies strewn across the floor, either dead from forming those runs or dead from the Atwood Empire soldiers striking them down.

"These are not your people. They are bodies purchased through an incomplete mercantile license connected to the Undead Empire," the ghost explained, the words practically spilling out of her mouth in her hurry to salvage the situation. "They were modified to look like your guards and then infused with chimeral souls made from our own people. However, for the aura to completely fool the scans, your guards had to be alive and linked to these warriors."

"What happened to them now that these chimeral souls are collapsing?" Zac grunted as he crossed the courtyard with a flash, appearing next to Vilari.

The mentalist didn't say anything, only slightly smiled as she patted his arm, almost as though confirming he was really there. Zac smiled back in her as he looked into her unique eyes, but this unfortunately wasn't the time for a proper reunion. He had to deal with these ghosts before they did something stupid again.

"They should have gotten a weak backlash, but the connections are not strong enough to harm them," the other ghost added, shying away a bit upon Zac's sudden appearance. "In fact, they are not far away. With your permission, we can call for our people to lead them here."

"You're quite helpful all of a sudden," Vilari smiled from the side before she turned to Rhuger. "Get a report of the surroundings, and try to contact the outer forts. The ghosts might be attacking our border guards as we speak."

"There is no such thing happening," the Ghost Queen hurriedly assured.

“Why should I believe you?” Zac snorted.

“Survival above all. Our plan was like this from the start. If this gambit succeeded, your people would be cut off from your planet. We would launch a full-scale war, hopefully dragging these demons with us to deal with you, the greatest threat, before turning on each other,” the Ghost King explained, hiding nothing. “If we failed, we would immediately surrender. If my liege so desires, execute everyone here, but we beg you to leave a route to survival for our citizens.”

“I hope my liege can appreciate the situation we found ourselves in,” the other ghost added. “If we didn’t approach the Undead Empire, we would’ve met our demise in 100 years.”

Zac was still not willing to just forgive these ghosts after they launched an attack on his people, but they did have a point. Their situation wasn’t the same as the Mavai tribes. They could essentially find a place within any larger faction of Zecia even if they weren’t placed within the Azh’Kir’Khat Horde.

Conversely, the Kingdom of Raun would be annihilated by any faction except the Undead Empire.

‘We have told them of ‘Mr. Black’, but it is unclear if they believed us when we said a pureblood Draugr leads the Einherjar,’ Vilari’s voice once more entered his mind.

“What are your names?”

“Aouvi, my liege,” the ghost looking like an old bearded man hurriedly introduced himself.

“Carva, my liege,” the regal-looking spectral queen followed.

“Eomid broke the truce today, but there is still a road of survival for the Kingdom of Raun,” Zac slowly said as he looked at the subdued ghosts. “However, if you and the Mavai Tribes want to save this planet, a price has to be paid.”