

## 108 – His Resting Place

Saoirse and I were standing in front of an upright stone casket within the catacombs of the Altar Cathedral. A heavy layer of dust filled the grooves of its carvings, which were a mixture of text and stylised imagery depicting the life of the person interred within.

It was one of dozens in the deep part of the catacombs, and the area was normally inaccessible to outsiders, but Ludwig had pulled some strings to get me in. Granted, if either he or the Church knew my plans, they would never have allowed me near this place. Although they were careful enough to have assigned two white-clad guards to watch over me.

I reached out to wipe some of the dust layer off, but one of the guards stopped me.

“Please do not touch the casket.”

“I can’t read what it says,” I replied.

“It is meant that way,” he said, surprising me.

I looked around at the other standing caskets. They clearly belonged to members of the Church who had been prominent in their time, but they were all uncared for same as the one before me.

*If you wish, I can tell you what it says,* Saoirse offered.

*I would appreciate that.*

She came over in front of the casket, then began reading aloud, much to the consternation of the two guards. It seemed that the occupant was one who was meant to be forgotten.

*Theodor Grey, revered Priest Crusader & Bishop of the Church.*

*His life’s work was to bring stability and order to the region of Altar, and he was known by those he left behind to be a serious and brave man.*

*His legacy is one that will not be immediately noticed by future generations, but is one of the fundamental pillars that has made the Church into a great institution.*

*He leaves behind a wife and two adoptive children.*

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*37th year of Seram*

I sighed. It hurt to know that my friend had been intentionally forgotten, his remains and history interred in a dark corner of the institution he had served most of his life.

“The images depict his journey from arriving in Mondus, to his memorable deeds as a Priest and later as a Crusader. The last carving is a rendition of him, his wife, and two children it seems.”

“That’s enough!” said one of the guards.

Saoirse cast him a killing glare. “Do not shout before the dead. Respect the lives they lived and the deeds they performed.”

“With all due respect, men like him have been obliterated from the Church’s history for a reason,” the other guard explained. “It is believed to bring misfortune to say their names out loud.”

“Theodor Grey,” I said into the air, defying him.

Both men flinched.

“It’s time for you to leave now, Exorcist,” said the guard.

*Can you knock them out without killing them?*

*Do fish swim in the ocean?*

*Is that a ‘yes’?*

*Of course.*

Saoirse moved forward in a sudden burst of speed and there followed two *smack* sounds, before the guards collapsed in the narrow hallway like two human-shaped sacks of potatoes. Both men had been Natives, but, even then, the ease with which she pulled it off was astounding.

*You’re certain this will work?*

*Is the sky blue?*

*Can’t you just say yes??*

“It will work,” she said.

I gritted my teeth, then put my black hand on the casket, before sending my energy into the remains inside.

“Do you remember the words?”

“I remember.”

*Theodor Grey, Guardian Wraith and loyal Priest Crusader,*

*Thou have slumbered long enough, but it is time to rise anew,*

*By the power of our Pact, take hold within this vessel that once was yours,*

*Let mine soul and that of mine Soul-Bound Companion sustain you,*

*Be reborn to animated life and resume thine service to me,*

*I wield thy soul in my palm, yet I seek a friend and not a servant,*

*Let thy soul manifest and hark mine words,*

*And until thy Pact be dissolved,  
Obey mine whims and wishes.*

Black smoke suddenly billowed from the skin of my Death’s Hand and snuck into the cracks of the casket, filling the interior with Saoirse’s Power of Death. The ground trembled and the ceiling shook, releasing dust and minor debris, while the layer covering the casket itself seemed to take to the air on an unfelt wind.

A long deep sigh came from the stone casket and I quickly took a step to the side, only for the vertical lid to pop off and fall to the floor with a loud crash that would surely summon guards to investigate.

*We need to hurry!*

*Do not hasten things such as these. I will deal with anyone who would interfere, fret not.*

*I’ll definitely be labelled a heretic for this...*

*And yet you agreed to my suggestion with such ease.*

*Yeah, well, I owe him a lot.*

Black smoke spilled out of the open casket, before a figure with slate-grey skin took one step out and then collapsed to his knees.

**“...Where...am...I?”**

“You’re in Altar,” I said.

The man looked up at me. The hair that fell from his head was like spun gold and his eyes were like a cosmic sea of bright azure. His face was chiselled and handsome, but the skin clearly marked him as something not-quite-human. What’s more, he had an aura like a real living person. I was unsure if it was thanks to Saoirse’s magic or because of the ritual.

**“...Ryūta? What have you...done to me?”**

“I’ve brought you back, Armen. For real this time.”

He looked down at his slate-grey naked body, realisation seeming to set in.

**“Am I a Revenant?”**

“Nothing so basic,” Saoirse answered. “You are a True Undead, a soul bound to its former body.”

**“Such a thing is impossible.”**

“Apparently not, if you have a Dullahan available that is,” I remarked dryly.

**“...A Dullahan...Ryūta...what has happened in my absence?”**

“I’ll tell you later, first we must get out of here.”

Saoirse twirled her index finger around and a cloud of her black smoke enveloped him, before taking the shape of black armour like her own, which covered him from head to toe, leaving no part of his grey skin visible.

The sound of running footsteps echoed down the hall. The way to get here had been a series of narrow claustrophobic interlinked pathways, and any sort of fighting would be out of the question.

Armen looked around, then said, “**I know a shortcut that leads to the Lake.**” He had put things together surprisingly-fast.

Before we left the room with his now-vacant casket, he leaned down and healed the two unconscious men.

“What did you do that for?”

“**They had serious concussions.**”

I cast a glance to Saoirse, who just shrugged.

After leading us back the way we’d come, he veered through a dark tunnel where lights only appeared every ten-metres-or-so. I felt a mix of elation that the ritual had worked like Saoirse had said and the dark realisation of what I’d done. The echoing steps of approaching guards dimmed as Saoirse and I followed closely behind him. We seemingly were moving deeper into the catacombs, but it was clear that, despite the hundreds of years since Armen had been alive, he knew the way to go. After all, he had helped found this place, if I understood things correctly.

The thought that I had accomplished something that was mentioned in the back section of my Encyclopaedia as impossible, i.e. resurrecting the dead, filled me with both pride and apprehension. Even a ‘normal’ kind of resurrection, such as was Mortl utilised, was considered strictly forbidden. She was seemingly only allowed to utilise undead because of her stature and the Crown’s seal of approval, while Summoners and Exorcists had to contend with the next-best thing: Revenants.

However, creating a True Undead was not a straight-forward matter, or so Saoirse had told me. But Armen’s situation had been the perfect fit. To pull it off you needed: the intact skeleton of the deceased; their enduring spirit, i.e. their spirit in the form of a Wraith, Shade, or similar incorporeal entity; and their True Name. And a Demon would not work in this case, meaning it had to be the rare instance of a Wraith or Shade with an intact personality. On top of that, it required a tremendous amount of energy to pull off. Had I attempted it alone, I would’ve probably killed myself by burning through my soul, thus Saoirse had been the provider for the majority of the needed power.

*I hope you do not hate me for this...*

**“You have given me the one thing I wanted: another chance,”** he answered to my thoughts.  
“**Although...**”

“Although what?” I asked.

**“Binding your soul to a Reaper is a grim price to pay, and now I, by extension, am likewise bound.”**

“I did not bind myself to Saoirse because I had a choice nor because I knew she had this knowledge,” I told him.

“I’ve always wanted to create a True Undead,” she commented.

**“I suppose a Reaper has peculiar hobbies,”** Armen remarked.

“I’m glad both of you are so amusing,” she said with a grin in her voice.

We rounded a corner and began moving up an incline, though at this point there were no more lanterns and it seemed as if we were moving through a cave system rather than catacombs, thanks to the clammy air and uneven floor. Armen held out his gauntleted hand and produced a golden light that lit our way.

As his light lit up the walls, I saw that my guess was only sort of correct, as the hallway we moved through had been carved by human hands, but hadn’t yet been fully developed for tombs to be interred within.

“I think your idea of amusement is warped,” I replied.

**“You must be naïve if you assumed anything less of a Reaper,”** Armen joked.

“Your gratitude did not last long,” I shot back.

Saoirse chuckled.

**“What do you plan to do when they find out about this?”**

“My Party is waiting by the docks, so I will leave the city before anyone can trace this back to me.”

**“The Church will want to punish you for defiling a tomb.”**

“Even one no one cared for?” Saoirse asked, her remark scathing but her tone casual.

Armen didn’t immediately reply and I knew the words had wounded his pride. And it was obvious why: no one was meant to return after their death and learn of the legacy they had left behind.

**“I died by the hand of my successor,”** he suddenly explained. **“He went on to become the leader of the Church, taking credit for much of my work. If not for the few prominent followers of mine, I am sure he would’ve tossed my corpse in the Lake.”**

“Humans are fascinating,” Saoirse commented.

We came out into a large chamber full of water, and the sound of lapping waves resounded through the stone walls.

**“We’re almost there,”** he said. **“We should emerge just past the city walls by the shore.”**

*Karasumany, show me the docks of Altar.*

My right ear and eye were overtaken by my Observer’s senses, while I continued following my reborn familiar and his light, with Saoirse right behind me.

I saw the sunlit docks and the group of people waiting there, among which were Renji, Ludwig, Elye, and Emily. The Spellhand and I would leave the city normally and head northwest, but the rest of them would take boats to the furthest eastern point of Altar Lake, then ride north to reach Fortress Major. We’d agreed to meet by the docks as a result, and I had excused myself by telling my Party that I was going to attempt to resummon Armen. It hadn’t been a complete lie, but I’d still felt how Renji’s eyes had scrutinised me carefully.

Moving the crowd through the city, I saw how two groups of six guards were standing at the main entrance to the Cathedral, clearly preparing to capture anyone trying to flee that way. Getting to the docks would be difficult I realised.

*I can make a boat for us, Saoirse said. That will circumvent the need to re-enter the city through a guard post.*

*Is your power omnipotent or something??*

**“Do not underestimate the power of a Reaper,”** Armen commented, clearly hearing the conversation in my head. **“They possess the means to travel anywhere, whether by land or sea.”**

I nodded. “Fine, please make us a boat then.”

No sooner had I said it than daylight emerged into the semi-flooded cave system we were moving through.