

Through Many Lives

Trying to press forward with screams and curses heaped on their enemies, the heaving mass of sweating, bleeding soldiers remained trapped. Pinned against the rock face of a mountain by overwhelming numbers of the enemy, they realized one by one that they were trapped. Like a wild animal caught in a trap, they began to lash out. Forgoing all thought of previous training, they began to swing their swords like wild men. Many were reaching for their daggers, and when disarmed, biting and flailing until they were killed. This was a nasty civil conflict between armies that only served to weaken the morale and fighting ability of their overall war effort. No one knew the dark and violent thoughts they all were having, and the acts they committed against one another were actually spells of Xuraxus.

Drayus Rush was a dying nineteen year old conscript from a nothing village in a forgotten valley. Being one of the weakest soldiers he was in the rear, and now pinned against sharp rocks by the sheer weight of armored thousands. He grew up a pig farmer's bastard son, never touching a weapon except to shovel dung, and when the order of energy came through the villages looking for new pupils, he was never chosen. Drayus was born with the odd feeling there was nothing special about him, so he never received an education. He never tried to teach himself anything new. Living an accomplished life was a foreign concept to him. He existed to feed hogs. The tragedy is Drayus was happy to be a middling nobody, taking orders and abuse from those who thought themselves his betters. So, it was no great surprise on that crisp autumn morning when the king's soldiers rode into town that he was conscripted without a single word of protest. He wasn't excited, he wasn't nervous, and he wasn't afraid. Drayus was like a leaf on the wind, he just was.

“Oh well,” Drayus muttered while being chained to the other conscripts for transportation. ‘It is what it is, you can’t fight fate.’ He thought to himself. His lifelong attitude of passivity and apathy is the reason he is where he is today; suffocating against pitiless rocks in the scorching midday sun, a forgotten nothing of a boy. Not even to be remembered in another’s tale of history.

The enemy pushed ever harder, now Drayus could feel his metal armor cracking, and the leather straps popping. He could no longer take a breath; blood began to pour from his eyes, ears, nose, and mouth. The pain was overwhelming, when he thought he could take no more there was a sudden shift into another space, and then only silence as he drifted in the womb of creation. Drayus let go of himself and the concept of self, he was floating, still Drayus. Looking down he saw his mangled corpse and men falling everywhere to the sword, after that he saw nothing but a blackness before the universe existed.

“What an embarrassing way to die.” A voice of infinite power and scope boomed, filling the dark void with its enormity.

“Oh, I don’t know, it’s better than a sword through the heart.” Drayus heard his ignorant reply in a voice that he didn’t recognize. He seemed to be a spectator here in this nonplace.

“Really, you think so? My, you were untethered weren’t you?”

Knowledge and change came to Drayus like a waterfall washing over his being, filling him with unearned wisdom. Drayus didn’t have to ask in this ever changing black nonplace, he knew the answers. The voice was right. A sword would have been quicker, more honorable, and definitely less painful. Drayus knew it was also true that he was untethered, a soul born into the world before the beings of Destiny and Fate could attach their future. There can be no delay in the Multiverse; the never ending procession of souls must be kept moving at all costs. When Destiny and Fate cannot decide on a future, as happens from the odd time to

time, then the poor souls are born into a lingering, and often repeating existence. A few of them become great untethered, and they soar, but most fade to nothing without the path of Destiny and Fate's hand to guide them.

“So...my life was meaningless due to circumstances out of my control and now that life is over due to the same?”

“No, never meaningless, untethered always return to the world in new forms, often endlessly until they grow beyond themselves, which may take forever on your timescale.”

“You're saying I'm to be some kind of reincarnating hero?” Drayus chortled like the pigs he was raised with. Even here, with this knowledge, there remained some vestige of his mortal ignorance.

“No, the one named Drayus is dead. If you're lucky a new face of yours will be a hero within a few millennia. Your lack of a predetermined future prevents you from moving to the next realm until you do grow beyond yourself, so break your limits.”

There was a blinding white light, followed by searing pain, the world was pain, next came the smell, it was...manure. Opening his eyes, the man who was Drayus was not. Lying in a pile of manure he sat up and shook his head, it hurt so badly to move. To his amazement, shocks of long warrior hair fell over the shoulders. He knew nothing, remembered nothing of untethered Drayus.

“Beast! Hey Beast, you in here?” A shrill voice rang through the barn as the giant called Beast hoisted his massive frame out of the manure mattress. With his first step he left any vestige of Drayus Rush on the floor with the manure.

“Yeah, yeah, I'm here...barely.” Beast grumbled while holding himself on the horse stall, feeling nauseous. The lone horse in the barn eyed him suspiciously.

“What in forty three hells are you doing in here anyway? It smells like a horse's ass.”

“I don’t remember; I woke up in the manure.”

“In the manure? Damn big fella how much did you drink last night?”

“Too much I guess,” Beast answered with a shrug. He could feel his heartbeat pounding through his temples, the barn was spinning.

“Well, come on then, it’s time for the fight.”

“Time for what? What fight?”

“Really... Wow... you did have too much to drink huh? Let’s see, how to explain softly. You’re supposed to fight the Braymen’s army champion today. He’s undefeated with twelve kills in solo combat, all within two minutes.” He took a breath and continued as Beast had dry heaves. “We all know you’re the biggest and strongest among us, and we know you’ve won some fights yourself. No one here could match you, that’s for sure, but this guy... he’s a different type of champion. A once in a lifetime champion, please be careful Beast. That or rip his head off when he bows.” Beast grinned as they laughed. “If by some miracle you win, we all go free. If you lose, the Braymen army lays siege and we’ll all be dead in a month. No pressure or anything.”

“Now you see why I have to drink,” They both tried a grim, dead man’s laugh, insincere and forced from the gut. “Anyway, I don’t trust a word spoken by the Braymen king. He will not end the siege, and he will not let us go free if I win. I mean when I win.”

“He gave his solemn vow Beast. The solemn vow is sacred, especially to the Braymen. Their line has never broken a sacred vow in the past four hundred years. Remember the release of the army at Three River Pine, when that renegade sorcerer Jhikul spellbound an entire legion? The King released all of them when he said he would. Even Jhikul was freed after a time.”

“True, he was merciful there. I guess we will see what happens today.”

Though young and inexperienced he's called Beast because at over eight feet tall and shredded muscle, he is hairy as an ape. He was dubbed "The scariest looking "man" anyone has ever seen," by his own home town. Covered in scars and tattoos from his pirating youth he has the long hair of an undefeated warrior grown to the middle of his back. He wears a suit of armor in battle that is so heavy there's no mount strong enough to convey him. Though having only four solo duels, he has never lost a fight, evidenced by the fact he is alive.

Swallowing any fear and striding to the place of battle proudly Beast carried a two hand sword the size of a normal man while gleaming in his menacing black armor. Everyone moved out of the way as quickly as possible. When he reached the center of the circle of death where all the men were supposed to be gathered from both armies to witness the fight, Beast froze upon seeing his enemy. It was an army of undead abominations. This was not the Braymen king's army, but then Beast knew the horror of the answer like a blade in his heart, they were men of the Braymen army previously, and now...

Xuraxus, lord of the undead brought this evil north, finally breaking out of the icy southern reach he was encased in. For decades the mortal races fought his return north, but every man who died became a new soldier for Xuraxus. It was impossible to stop such a foe, only to delay the inevitable, how and why did they come this far north? No one could understand the failure of magic in the order of energy. Xuraxus was supposed to be encased in the icy southern continent, forever trapped.

The "champion" Beast set to fight was a young, straggly looking undead covered in blood and matted bone. His mangled face was a nightmare from some forgotten past, nothing, and nobody.

"You know me warrior?" The creature spoke, spitting blood with every word. "My name was Drayus Rush." The voice came from the darkest pits of a

fiery hell, many soldiers hearing the voice died from its power, others fell on the ground clutching their bleeding ears, trying to remove them. Beast was frozen; there was too much magic here, and a memory in his mind. He couldn't place his thoughts on it, but this felt wrong, all too wrong.

“I know you must be destroyed filth!” Beast cried, and with a mighty leap descended upon the animated corpse.

Bringing down his sword of destruction, Beast screamed as the sword and his muscled arms shattered into a thousand broken pieces of ruin. The gathered soldiers began to shout in terror as a melee broke out among them, it was a disorganized mess of fear. In the circle of death, the mangled corpse of Drayus Rush was gone, left standing in its place was the lord of the undead himself, Xuraxus. He was ten feet tall of bone and dripping gore, rotting flesh clung in acidic lumps. His magic had grown overwhelmingly, like trying to stare into the sun his horror was blinding.

The giant known as Beast lay dying without landing a single blow, his last vision while he bled out was Xuraxus beginning to eat the soldiers.

“My...first... loss.” Unconsciousness took him, and there was a flash of light. He was being pulled, and then pushed before falling into the light and darkest of dark.

With a gasp of air and a coughing fit there was light again through slightly cracked eyes.

“There there now, you've been through an ordeal dear, try and relax for me.” She was an older woman, plump and kindly looking with red cheeks. She wore the uniform of mercy, an order of healers.

“Where am I”? The voice was small, weak, and distant.

“Shhh, you're safe girl, sleep for now.”

The word felt good to hear, “safe.” She didn’t have to remember thoughts she wanted to forget while asleep, it was nice to forget.

Her village was attacked by skeletons, burned by demons, and during it all she hid in the well with her brothers Timplon, and Grejory. Where were they? How did she get here? Questions racked her fevered brain; mercifully it was the silence of sleep allowed her the peace being awake would not.

When she woke again the room was empty and there was a tray of hot tea with butter cookies on the small wooden nightstand. In the middle of her devouring the tray Timplon, Grejory, and the sister of mercy burst into the room.

“Jeine!” Timplon yelled with exalted glee at seeing his sister.

“You’re awake!” Grejory followed with as they rushed to her side. The three laughed together for the first time since the slaughter.

“I see we’re feeling better,” the sister of mercy smiled happily.

The three siblings were so busy laughing they didn’t notice the Elemental King enter the room. He resembled a moving tree. Tall and slender, muscled perfectly in this form. With his long white hair and bright white eyes brimming with ethereal magic he bore a striking likeness to his cousins the elves, but he is no elf. He is the king of all elementals, “Ruleibishan the Magnificent.” Possessing all various elemental qualities of his people, the king is an otherworldly figure living among mortal races while at the same time living beyond their understanding. Though similar to elves in corporeal form, they are not as passive or nature oriented as their body bound cousins. They exist across multiple realms and dimensions simultaneously. Their knowledge extends to worlds never dreamed of by mortal minds. The King leaned over and spoke softly like a passing breeze.

“Hello Jeine, the sister of mercy is correct. Though there is no safety in war, this is a safe place for you.”

When he finished speaking the room was ironically torn asunder by a giant exploding fireball. Bits of mortar, stone, wood, and hay blew through the air with no mercy. Everyone in the room disappeared, flying in various directions. Jeine woke on the ground; she didn't know how long it had been. Instinct told her to stand and run.

"Timpton, Grejory..." her brothers names whirled through her terrified mind in frenzy. The tears streamed down her face as she ran towards a large lake and plunged into the icy cold water, she didn't know why. With the shock to her system she passed out again. Closing her eyes she saw the orange and red flames consume the castle of the Elemental King as she slid under the water.

A familiar sensation came over her, pushing, pulling, falling, and then a blinding white light before the dark, like being stuck in a well and unable to move. The darkness was overwhelming, suffocating.

"Grandpa... grandpa... wake up." A little cherub faced girl shook the old man, and he snorted awake from his dream.

"What is it child... what is it?" He grumbled back, rousing grumpily from his old man sleep. He just went to sleep after half an hour of an angry stomach keeping him awake.

"You were snoring again." She poked his big, red nose.

"Oh, is that all? I thought there was a war on, the way you were shaking these old bones." He turned to pour a drink from the bottle next to his chair.

"War? No, only the messy men."

"Messy men?" He put the bottle down and placed his granddaughter on his lap, now very concerned.

"You know grandpa," she made undead imitations that sent a chill through his old, crooked spine. He set her back on the floor quietly.

“Down to the cellar child... be quick now, grandpa has to check on the messy men. Find your mother and brother, go down there with them.”

“Cleira!” The old man called for his daughter, she was already gathering the children and moving to the cellar, she had been through this before. She seemed unconcerned about her father.

‘The undead army grows in power and size, how do you stop those already dead?’ Cleira thought to herself as she made her way to the safety of the well stocked cellar with her children.

Outside, the streets were filled with undead abominations, either wandering aimlessly or eating with purpose. Striding through the fodder were fire demons wreathed in a nimbus of blue flame. They oozed malice in the form of black gore dripping over them continually igniting their flames with small explosions. They were in command of the undead legions.

The old man pulled back the curtains and scrambled to his hidden closet behind the bedroom paneling. He fell halfway down the stairs in his rush and shattered his already fragile hip, the pain was excruciating, but his desire was stronger than the pain.

“One more time, old man...one more time...plleeaassee.” He pleaded with himself and dragged his limp body over to an old chest made of a rough green stone. It had not been touched in years, and was covered with dust.

Placing his left hand over the green chest he finally collapsed from exhaustion with a smile on his face. The chest made a clicking and whirring noise as the room exploded into a kaleidoscope of magic, all colors of the rainbow and then some were dancing through the shadows, changing the dark cellar into a magical and bright place. For a brief moment lost in time, that cellar was a small piece of another world.

The old grandpa was gone, melted like a wax covering. Left standing in his place was a God-like wizard from lost realms, seething in red anger. He smashed through the floor with a spell of destruction, and landed in the heavily infested streets with an incinerating thump, every undead minion and demon commander for a hundred yards in every direction became a pile of white ash.

And then he stood in the Main Square alone. A tall, rail thin man of wiry disposition still bearing the long and wispy white beard of a grandfather, except now there was a powerful strength radiating from him, so extreme that a physical thumping sound was coming from him, like a heart holding back a tidal wave of blood. Long red robes of a blood wizard hung loosely around his thin frame and blew often, though there was no wind to stir it. The staff held in his left hand was a single shaft of glimmering green crystal topped with a globe of incandescent, yellow light. The undead and their demon commanders began to encircle the wizard as he stood still allowing himself to be trapped. When the evil was twenty yards from the wizard they stopped. They stood moaning, gnashing, and losing limbs in their frenzied crush. The demon commanders towered over their rotting undead followers. They silently burned while watching the old wizard with a violent hatred of pure fire.

'Why aren't they moving?' The wizard thought to himself, it seemed they were all waiting for something, or someone.

And in that space between waiting and arriving, Xuraxus appeared in smoke and fire while sacrificing several followers to complete his portal spell. He was disgusting to try and look at; he was an abomination of existence. The old wizard showed no emotion. A normal man would usually die upon looking at Xuraxus. The Lord of the Undead recognized this wizard for the power he was, almost a God in a forgotten realm. This wizard was ancient; on his world before time

existed he became a God through magic. Though he failed to ascend, he is much more than a simple human practitioner.

“Why do you hinder me old one?” Xuraxus belched as one of his eight arms fell off. The grass under his feet died and all living things of the Earth near him followed. His very presence was an assault on the Earth Goddess.

“I am of this world creature, you do not belong here.”

“What is this world to you? Only one of an infinite number of two legged dead for my army, nothing more. You actually care for these things?” Xuraxus picked up an undead and tore him in half before flinging the corpse aside like garbage.

“I will not allow you to destroy this world Xuraxus.”

“And can you stop me fiend? My army consumes this world as we speak, the mortal races are so filled with terror they are paralyzed. Their armies and defenses collapse and flee from every engagement, yet you say you will not allow? You dare speak to the true God of Death? I am the one... who will not allow you to live!”

Xuraxus struck out and destroyed the crystal staff with his spell while slicing the old wizard's throat with one of his eight arms. The old one never moved or even tried defending himself. Howls of glee, and black tongued oaths filled the air at the slicing of the wizard. He stood there squirting blood as Xuraxus reveled in his victory. He stood there longer than was possible, and shockingly he spoke.

“You cannot kill me...too late...eternal,” with those last words the wizard fell onto his face, dead in every realm. There was no pushing or pulling, no flash of light, no darkness, there was nothing, the old one was gone.

Yet, in this world of the living a change was immediate, battle horns sounded all about the field, every race of mortal surrounded the massed army of

Xuraxus along with the Lord of the Undead himself, trapped in the center like a half dead rat.

“No...it cannot be this...these puny slaves dare defy me?” Xuraxus fumed and hissed as he waded into the fray to break the siege. When he did, the voice of the dead wizard spoke filling the air and freezing him in place.

“We are eternal. A spell begins with an idea.”

Now Xuraxus knew his fate was sealed. With his first taste of fear in eons he knew it to his rotten core. The old wizard completed the worst of spells to the undead, an undoing.

Through his death he gave all of himself to everyone alive, his being, his magic, and his bravery. All infused into every cowardly, disorganized mortal heart, completely transforming the consciousness of the planet. The spell is forbidden among the order of energy because it requires the caster’s life, but circumstances dictate outcome, and the old wizard considered himself above such rules, being a God in other realms.

Over the din of approaching horse hooves and death groans of his doomed undead army, Xuraxus could hear the races of the world cheering as one. The power the wizard gave them was truly magnificent! Even Xuraxus had to marvel and tremble at such a complete and quick change of being.

“I am the wizard! I am the wizard! I am the wizard!” Their chants were proud and all together as if nothing could ever stop them.

This journey through many lives, seemingly unconnected is more powerful than any army could ever dream of being. Solitary face after solitary face in life weave an intertwined whole. Our past informs our future while those alive in the present remain ignorant of sacrifice. He gave his soul so everyone would have a life and an afterlife. The wizard gave so freely of himself that all cycles were

broken, all oppression was ended, and through this giving an enlightened age of peace reigns where demons once boldly tread.