

## The Fall 1052

### [Chapter 1052 - Karma Concluded](#)

Three more lives passed before Zac's eyes. The minstrel who sought to lift an ancient curse through Creation, the flickering flame who wished to become a sun, and the warrior who wanted dominion over Life and Creation to resurrect his daughter. Beings of great determination who had turned the shards into engines for their desire.

The trio knew they were trading the vast longevity of a cultivator for a short moment of glory. They felt it a worthy sacrifice if they could turn their desires into reality. Like before, they were at the precipice of Atavism, believing that step to be the key to achieving their goal. The message of the visions was identical to the splinter's, yet Zac's heart wasn't moved.

Zac was too occupied with his immediate concerns to worry about the future, and he used the first outburst of Creation to forge a powerful shell that blocked out the collapse of the golden sun. He could feel the Beast Kings draw closer with murderous intents, but his attention was fully on the situation in his Soul Aperture.

The shard had made a beeline for his mind after entering his body, sensing the dangerous situation of its brethren. It crashed into the fully-charged splinter like a meteor, and the collision unleashed a flood of energy into his aperture. The two enormous Soul Spirals were spinning to the point of almost going out of control, but they couldn't absorb the efflux quickly enough to prevent damaging his cores.

The remnants remained indifferent to the collateral damage they caused and were already rearing for a second exchange. Zac furiously held back the remnants with everything he got while pulling two threads of Oblivion and Creation into his shoulders. The energy highways happily accepted the overflow and subtly transformed the energies before releasing them into his chest.

The process had started, and a deep rumble in the sky penetrated the roar of two collapsing stars. Zac was filled with a sense of déjà vu upon seeing the remnants fearfully starting to struggle. It was no wonder the Heart of Oblivion and Spark of Creation failed to become the equivalent of Supremacies, even if they were unique entities singularly tuned to their respective Daos.

Their obsessions had made them stupid, for lack of a better word. They didn't learn, they didn't change. The first set of remnants he seized had been tricked the same way three times by now, yet they eagerly jumped into the trap all the same. The birth of Chaos had begun, and there was no escape. Torrential amounts of energy were forcibly dragged out from the remnants, and the churning ball in his chest was fast reaching its tipping point.

The world outside mirrored the chaos within. Worldending clashes of Life and Death shook the Calamity as two broken stars collided. Zac could feel the unique energy signature of Creation encountering Oblivion all around him, and he almost felt like he and the stars were one. Was this how Catheya felt upon harmonizing with the world?

Possibly, though Zac knew it wasn't the same. Harmonization was likely impossible for him to begin with. How would you possibly connect with the Heavens without any affinities? His perception was from having his soul overloaded by Oblivion and Creation, just like the two stars had been for centuries.

Thousands of eruptions added to the turmoil around him every second, each powerful enough to rip Beast Kings to shreds. The orbiting moons had already collapsed, and Zac could guess the fates of their inhabitants. Only the two leaders remained, but not even they were able to easily endure the explosions. Yet they pressed toward him, their killing intent dense enough to twist the air around them.

With the shard snatched just like the splinter, the Gwyllygi no longer had any reason to impede its nemesis. Instead, they found themselves in the same boat and had teamed up to deal with him. Zac guessed they wanted to make him spit out the remnants before moving them to a new set of suns. Or perhaps finally consume the items themselves.

They were much too late for that.

The storm raged, the sky rumbled, but Zac was removed from it all. He was a storm unto his own, where his latent energy emanations kept the much larger tempest at bay. At first, it had been an unstable mix of Oblivion and Creation, but that suddenly changed as two opposing forces were reluctantly fused into one. A broken peak was temporarily made whole as Chaos graced the Calamity with its presence.

The world suddenly stilled, and even the Late-Stage Beast Kings halted their advance. It was like an ancestor had descended upon the realm, and the Calamity's Dao offered obeisance. It didn't dare create a scene when faced with the true terminus of its existence. Zac's body no longer mirrored the world outside. One was calm; the other was in absolute disorder.

The vast amounts of energy had formed a fourth Glimpse of Chaos, and all his breakthroughs since the Orom World had done little to withstand its effect. He could only hold on to it for a short window, and he needed to make it count. Thousands of possibilities and urges filled his mind, but he held onto a seed of clarity as he corralled the drained remnants back into their prison.

He could tell this was the last time. The cage was teetering on the brink of collapse, with the runes barely having withstood six remnants fighting for a minute. Four sets would be able to break out anytime they wanted after they'd recovered from the extraction. Hopefully, they wouldn't figure that out before Zac had found the fifth pair and was ready for Atavism.

Zac could tell that whatever happened at that point would break the status quo of the past two decades. One is an eternal curse, two is a calamity. Five is Atavism, where five lingering resentments form a Consciousness. He didn't know why he knew, but that would be a tipping point. He would either take control of the remnants or be consumed by their immortal will. No matter the outcome, there would be no need for a prison.

The people in the visions had known the same thing and felt it was an unavoidable tribulation to accomplish their goals. Was that the trap within those visions? Were the remnants trying to give him a false sense of security as they led you to your doom? Zac shook his head. He'd still keep going even if it were a trap. He believed Be'Zi wasn't trying to harm him when she gave him that mission.

More importantly, he believed in himself and his ability to turn a disaster into an opportunity. In either case, it was a worry for later. He had decades to shore up his heart and soul before the deadline. The ethereal tranquility of the Calamity only lasted a moment before a boundless presence forced its way into the scene. Gold and black flames were pushed away as clouds painted in blue and the imperial gold of the System descended.

The System's presence subdued the Dao itself, and the Calamity fully ground to a halt. The remnant energies of the broken stars had turned into two dense clouds about to form a hurricane. Zac could picture the kind of mayhem such a development would bring to the Calamity. Between such vast amounts of amassed energy and the infusion of Creation and Oblivion, it wouldn't be too surprising if another source of Chaos was born.

Of course, Zac could tell it wasn't fated to be.

Chaos raged through his body, his efforts at containing it in his chest almost useless. It left immense damage in its wake, but the torture brought a temporary state of clarity. The remnants had slowly transformed the stars, but they were still over ninety percent Life and Death. And the Oblivion and Creation it held was fractured, incomplete. It wouldn't be enough to converge into one.

The hurricane was destined to collapse before it formed, unleashing an unprecedented storm. The insight filled Zac with lamentation. The situation was an expression of the difficulty of his chosen path, a reminder of the dangers he'd face even if he'd finally reached this step. But the scene held the seed of possibility, a small ray of hope.

Zac's gaze turned to the distance, seemingly peering through endless layers of restrictions and energy. Far in the distance, a much-greater storm raged. A storm that would make even Autarch tread with care, where Oblivion and Creation were more common than Life and Death—the true face of the Calamity.

The Dao of Chaos allowed him to see the whole picture. Of course, he wasn't the System's only source of Chaos. The whole Calamity was a huge Chaos Generator that occasionally exposed a piece of the tapestry before destabilizing. Zac's attention shifted to the two tyrants who floated a few hundred meters away.

Their bodies trembled under his gaze, but they could not leave when held in place by the System.

"I'm sorry. You are innocent bystanders in this," Zac slowly said. "I ruined your home and cut off your cultivation. But in a way, I saved you from a tragedy down the road. As such, our Karma has concluded."

A rumble in the sky expressed the System's impatience, and Zac looked up with a smile as the Glimpse of Chaos emerged from his chest. "You know the rules. This time, I'm not asking for much."

He extracted a mote from the churning ball of Chaos, infusing it with his desire as he let it drift out from him. A gate appeared, and Zac wordlessly stepped through, leaving the Calamity behind. He suddenly found himself standing on the peak of Mount Illumination. The sky was already overcast and full of lightning, as though the System had anticipated his move.

Zac wasn't sure if the gate was possible through the Dao of Chaos or the System's approval. The true nature of Chaos was ultimately too difficult to grasp. He was only awarded some glimpses of the truth, but he also knew that the truth wasn't what it seemed when it came to this particular peak. All was flux.

That was fine. He hadn't been sure if his idea would work, but he'd figured if Chaos could take him from the Orom to Zecia, then surely a short skip back to his mansion would be easy. If it had failed, he would simply have jumped down toward the exit, though that would have delayed him by at least an hour. And there was no telling how the two tyrants would act after the System got what it wanted and left.

That wasn't a headache he needed while performing the next step.

Being temporarily connected to the Dao of Chaos confirmed the validity of his idea, but he didn't have much time. Zac extracted a second Chaos mote from the ball and gently dragged it back into his body, toward his Duplicity Core.

Chaos was the key to forming his core, but that didn't mean he'd suddenly decided to form a Chaos Core. His blueprint was still the same Trinity Core, Quantum Core, or Void Core, depending on which aspect you wanted to focus on. And before the Chaos Mote could be added to that plan, it needed to be transformed.

The inherent unpredictability in the Chaos Mote struggled against being controlled, but a flood of the Branches of Pale Seal and Kalpataru rapidly bound it to Zac's chariot. To ensure nothing went wrong, he also activated his bloodline to form a protective layer of Void Energy around the mote.

The Chaos Mote furiously resisted the foreign insights, but its energy was limited while Zac's soul was still overloaded with borrowed force. Eventually, it shuddered and split apart, like a cell undergoing mitosis. The two forces radiated the unmistakable aura of Oblivion and Creation for a moment, but the attunement soon shifted again. Left were the Daos of Life and Death.

You could argue that he'd ruined the magical nature of the Chaos Mote. After all, it was easy to split a Grand Dao into its lower components but almost impossible to take it the other way. That was doubly true for a broken peak like Chaos. The motes were just like the Primal Dao back in the Twilight Ocean, which likely was why the System was so impatient to get the glimpses. Wait too long, and the ambient Dao would sully their truths.

Still, the two little swirls of incredibly condensed truths contained something crucial, something that put it at the same level as the supreme treasures he'd prepared for today—potential. It was an energy that had once existed as the terminus of two of his Daos. That meant something, even when devolved into Life and Death.

You could see it from the simple fact that the two clouds of energy didn't act like what you'd normally see when bringing the Daos of Life and Death together. They calmly floated into the Duplicity Core's hatch. A small storm already raged inside from his opposing Daos. Life clashed with Death, urged on by the Branch of the War Axe.

That all stopped when the refined Chaos Mote entered the [Hollow Core]. The energies mixed, and the violent eruptions were quelled. Not even the Dao of Conflict could trigger the two Daos that suddenly snuggled together in a mottled mix of energy.

The world lit up as a bolt of lightning struck the ground right in front of Zac, but he ignored it. The System could wait a bit longer. Zac kept the Glimpse of Chaos close to his chest as he extracted a third mote. It was refined and pushed into his hatch, further stabilizing the situation.

A fourth mote soon followed, but Zac knew the fifth would have to be the last. It was a matter of balance. Just forming the glimpse had left him in a bad way. Every mote extracted was like a hurricane unleashed in his body, compounding the damage. A little bit of mutilation was fine in the pursuit of benefits, but he had to be in a condition to follow up with the next step.

"Thank you," Zac said, finally releasing the Glimpse of Chaos.

It floated away from him, showering the whole peak in the superlative truths of Chaos as Zac no longer kept them contained. The mountain rumbled, and the Dao of Samsara groaned as it unraveled. Samsara was a System of Order, creating an ecosystem of Life and Death governed by the laws of Karma and Order. Chaos was its antithesis, and its influence was like a rapidly spreading poison.

The whole sky shuddered as the ghost temples fought back. Dharmic hymns tried to impose their will on the peak, but all were forced into stillness as a golden pillar of lightning slammed into the glimpse. The System didn't care about the struggle for the meaning of Life and Death. It only cared about the insights within the glimpse. Zac looked on, trying to memorize some aspects for himself.

But his comprehension grew blurry and distant as the System absorbed the glimpse. Zac had known this would happen, so he wasn't disappointed. Who knew? The comprehension might have left a mark on his mind even if it wasn't clear right now. Just like the two motes inside the [Hollow Core].

The process only lasted a few seconds before the glimpse was gone. Clouds dispersed soon after, with the System uninterested in staying behind to observe what came next. Without the pressure, the tremors returned, and Zac snorted as one ghost temple after another around him crumbled. The Dao of Chaos had flooded the peak before being refined by the System's cleansing lightning.

The Sangha's connection to this abandoned peak deep in the Perennial Vastness had already been tenuous, and this was enough to forcibly sever Karma. The Dao Samsara collapsed and split into its base components. The transformation wasn't an integral part of Zac's plans, only a small bonus. It was a small safeguard to ensure no Dharmic loopholes snuck into his Cosmic Core, and it would hopefully let his mansion extract a bit more energy.

A small shockwave from within made Zac groan and turn to the situation within the Duplicity Core. The energies were still playing nice, but he had ultimately pushed a whole lot of energy into a cramped space. Even if the mutual hostility between Life and Death had been temporarily resolved, some commotion was still to be expected.

Furthermore, this fragile harmony was just a temporary truce. The transformed motes were unstable and couldn't remain in their current state for long. It was just a matter of time before they decayed even further, until they were no different from his own Daos. Before that happened, he needed to have set his foundation.

The whole reason he took the risk of incorporating the remnants in his Core Formation was to create this window of opportunity. He'd tried perfecting the plan for years, but there was a huge problem that couldn't be solved without taking some risks. The very first step of his Core Formation, where he'd fuse the Supreme Treasures into a nucleus, was filled with risk and uncertainty.

However, as long as he could get past that first hurdle, he'd have a stable foundation to build upon. From there, it'd be fine if the core was temporarily unbalanced as he added one layer of energy after another. The nucleus would keep the ship afloat until he remedied the issues and stabilized the core.

That's where the Chaos Mote came in. Utilizing the Dao of Chaos this way wasn't enough to permanently fuse Life and Death. Someone would already have formed a Life-death Core if that were the case—for example, the Undead Empire. There was no way they couldn't source a little bit of Chaos if they put their mind to it.

The Peak of Chaos was still broken, and a core like that would fall apart before it was created. But the refined motes were enough to temporarily calm down the Daos of Life and Death until he could permanently solve their incompatibility with the Void.

Zac turned toward his manor just ahead, which was already drawing torrential amounts of energy into its domain. The energy was so dense that the air twisted, and its attunement felt so familiar that it could just as well have been his own. The power of the fourteenth echelon was already proving its worth. The scene was set, and everything was in place.

Now, it was time to see if he could pull off a miracle.