

The Fall 733

Chapter 733: Repercussions

Zac knew he wasn't thinking rationally, but his desires muffled the voice of caution in the back of his mind. Using the Mark of Creation to forcibly take control of the egg was worth a try. He could sense that mysterious energies that filled the runes of the egg and the runes on the altar were too vast for him to overpower, but he might be able to snatch it as long as he seized control for just a moment.

As to whether this messed up Va Tapek's or the Undead Empire's plans, Zac couldn't care less. That man had sent him on what might almost be considered a suicide mission. If anything, Zac felt he would end up carrying a ball of resentment if he didn't do something to mess with his plans. Besides, Zac guessed the Monarch had a bunch of contingencies in case this egg never reached this place. After all, Va Tapek must have believed that Zac reaching this place was a long shot at best.

Two streams of mental energy and Dao entered the weird pathways on his shoulders, and they were soon joined by a mysterious intangible force that normally hid deep in his cells. A moment later a small sphere full of endless potential appeared behind his hands, a small rune barely visible inside. Zac kept infusing it with energy for a while until it stabilized while also instilling it with the purpose of why he was doing this.

Create an opportunity to steal the egg and have it become food for [Love's Bond]. Those thoughts and desires permeated the rune, and it subtly changed before Zac pushed it onto the egg. He sensed a slight resistance before the Mark of Creation entered the smooth surface and disappeared. A shudder passed through the egg, and it spread into the array and out into the whole mountain.

Zac was just about to see if he could take it, but a massive pulse suddenly threw him over thirty meters away as a storm of energy shot toward the sky from the altar itself. Millions of runes lit up all across the valley, and Zac found himself completely immobilized by a force far beyond what he could understand or endure. Unable to move, Zac found himself looking at the spectacle with a mix of horror and awe.

Who had created something like this? The tapestry that appeared among the walls spoke to the very core of Zac's soul, and he felt awash with inspiration while his body was inundated with a terrifyingly concentrated force. [Void Heart] and his soul had been quiet since entering the secluded valley, but they woke up with a vengeance to greedily swallow the extremely precious energies that raged all around him.

Zac barely registered what was going on inside his body as his eyes darted back and forth, trying to imprint the vast schematic that had appeared on the walls. The feeling was just like when he sat in front of the Big Boss's Big Wall, but on a far grander scale. Not only that, but the insights were related to Life, Death, and at least two other concepts that he had no understanding of.

Was he looking at the blueprint of the Twilight Energy, with all the insights that made it possible on open display for him?

Zac wouldn't complain even if he found himself stuck here for a year, but too much of a good thing wasn't beneficial either. The levels of energy quickly grew uncomfortable even for him, and it felt like the whole valley had been turned into an enormous cauldron, where he was part of the impurities that were being burned away by the raging waves.

The chaos didn't stay contained to the valley either, but it had rather shot toward the surface, creating a pillar of force that had to be visible from far and wide. His tampering with the egg must have made the ancient preparations go haywire, and he was now paying the price.

The outburst thankfully only lasted ten seconds, but that alone was enough to fill him with enough energy to almost explode. As for the energy itself, it was pretty odd as well. It was Twilight Energy, yet it wasn't. Its base was the same, but it was purer, more primal in a sense. He wouldn't even be surprised if the odd thing inside him was the source of the Twilight Energy, which when mixed with Miasma and Cosmic Energy became the 'lower' version that permeated the whole Mystic Realm.

The energy was filled with far more meaning than the original energy as well. Both his Soul Oceans were rapidly expanding and evolving, probably to a stage that he wouldn't be able to reach with Twilight Energy alone. Zac grunted as he got back to his feet, a bit flummoxed that what should have been an opportunity for Alea somehow had become an opportunity for himself.

He had just evolved his two final Dao Fragments to Peak Mastery with the help of the Life-Death Pearls, but he had already gained another bout of inspiration. Most of the concepts he had glimpsed on the runes were far beyond him right now, but they'd serve as a foundation for him to move toward forming his two branches.

Part of him really wanted to investigate the source of that amazing energy to see if he could siphon off any more, but the scope of the spectacle had set off warning signals in his mind. Such an outburst must have been seen or at least sensed from far and wide, and he wouldn't be surprised if both Rankers and Beast Kings were making their way toward his location at this very moment.

Outbursts like this were often a sign of a great treasure having been born, and if he suddenly emerged from the cave he would become a prime suspect. He needed to get away before that could happen.

However, he couldn't go before trying to actually steal the egg, and he flashed forward once more, suddenly appearing on top of the Altar. The egg had once more calmed down and resumed its normal beat, with each beat illuminating a few more runes. Try as he might, he still couldn't dislodge the thing from its spot on the pedestal.

There was one change though; Zac could actually sense his mark inside the egg. It hadn't been erased by the outburst, but had rather somehow fused with the treasure. With each beat, the Mark of Creation released a minute ripple that probably wouldn't be discernible to anyone but him, and Zac actually felt a weak connection slowly forming between himself and the treasure.

His abyssal eyes looked at the egg with anticipation, knowing that not all hope was lost just yet. Who knew, he might be able to wrest control sooner or later after the Mark of Creation had completely fused with the egg.

The question was how long that would take. For all he knew, it might take over a year, and Zac hesitated for a few seconds before he jumped down from the altar and started running toward the exit. This treasure was a big opportunity, but he needed to be alive to enjoy it. Who knew what problems could crop up if he stayed here. Better he leave for now and deal with his other matters, and come back in a year or two when the situation had calmed down.

He rushed through the tunnel, and Zac breathed out in relief when there were no massive beasts waiting outside. He still activated [Abyssal Phase], moving thousands of meters away from the cave mouth before the furious currents outside the secluded valley forced him back into his corporeal form.

Zac was about to swim away, but he suddenly felt a terrifying pressure descend upon him. He immediately turned around to see what was going on, and his eyes widened as a sanguine current ripped through the Twilight Chasm, heading straight for him. It was hundreds of meters long, and it almost looked like it intentionally crashed into the powerful currents in the chasm just because it could, crushing them with pure force.

An escape talisman appeared in his hand, but he sighed when it fizzled without activating. It was just a last-ditch effort though, since he had already known this would happen. The energies were far too chaotic in the chasm, making it impossible for the talismans to connect two different spots in space.

He considered activating [Abyssal Phase] again, but he knew he wouldn't be able to get far even if he forced it. Besides, the blood river moved extremely quickly, and it had already reached him.

"Oh? A Draugr reeking of mysterious energies appearing just after the whole chasm was thrown into chaos? Just what have you done?" a curious voice said as a young woman emerged from the stream.

It was an otherworldly beauty who had appeared in front of him, her features perhaps only matched by Iz Tayn or Be'Zi of those who he had encountered in his whole life. However, much like Be'Zi, her beauty was marred by a weird set of eyes where the sclera was red instead of white. She also had four small pupils instead of one, though Zac's own eyes widened a bit when the four pupils suddenly fused into one as she tilted her head.

A skill?

Her features were otherwise pretty much human, apart from her ears which were slightly prolonged and ended in a tip rather than a rounded bow. She emitted a graceful and even somewhat fragile aura, but Zac understood that she was anything but. It barely looked like the rampant current had any effect on her at all thanks to a few thick bloody swirls that circulated around her, and the river she had used to move through the chasm seemed more like a skill than a treasure.

Of course, the immensely powerful swirls of energy wasn't the only clue of what kind of being stood in front of him. More poignant was the '100,000' above her head. It was even higher than the mothertree, let alone any other trial takers. And he unfortunately had a pretty good idea who he had encountered.

"Reaver caught your tongue, Draugr?" the woman smiled.

"Mistress Noz'Valadir, I presume?" Zac sighed with a small bow. "It's an honor."

"Such a gentleman," she laughed. "Who are you?"

"I'm just a nobody who have come to the frontiers in search for opportunities," Zac smiled as he tried to figure out a way to get out of this mess.

There were four portals leading out of Twilight Ocean just outside the chasm, all of them days away. Then again, they were no good even if he could reach them since there were still a few months before

they would open to let people out of the Mystic Realm. And with his escape talismans not working, he would be hard-pressed to escape from this monster.

It looked like he could only pray that Uona Noz'Valadir wouldn't attack another Imperial.

"If you're a nobody, then why is your bloodline even purer than any heartland scion I've met?" Uona smiled. "My stomach is rumbling just from standing close to you. Are you a lineal descendant from the Abyssal Shores?"

"How could that be the case," Zac said with a strained smile. The conversation had taken an extremely regrettable turn.

"Alright, whatever. It's not surprising the Draugr have their eyes set on the opportunities in this quadrant. Tell me what happened here," Uona shrugged. "I want the energy that's coursing through your body, and I think you would prefer I take it from the source rather than from you."

Zac wholeheartedly agreed, but he also couldn't say the truth. The brand had disappeared, but who knew if the restrictions remained like an oath? What if he accidentally killed got himself killed by divulging the secrets. He could only mix some lies and truths and hope to get out of the situation in one piece.

"I was searching this mountain for opportunities when I felt an odd pulse from within. I tried to find a way inside since I figured it was something valuable, but the whole place was suddenly drowned in this energy to the point it almost killed me. I think someone got there first, they might even be absorbing the treasure as we speak," Zac hesitantly said, hoping to send the vampire on a goose chase.

"Don't play dumb with me," Uona said as a chilling pressure started to spread from her. Clearly she was not so easily convinced. "I could sense the unique aura from ten mountains over, yet there is not a hint of it anywhere except on you right now. Did you already eat the treasure?"

"If I did, I wouldn't be swimming around in these dangerous waters," Zac quickly said. "I would have secluded myself inside the mountain."

"So you're either lying or useless?" Uona sighed with disappointment. "Well, then you might as well die."

"Wait!" Zac shouted with alarm. "You must have come with the same goal as our people! We are on the same side, we shouldn't be fighting among ourselves when there are the Havarok to deal with."

"Same side?" Uona snorted as she pointed toward Zac. "There is only the side of the Eternal Clan. All else is cattle, that slippery bastard of a Princeling included. Since you refuse to help, then what good are you?"

Zac felt a sense of profound danger the next moment, and he immediately activated [Profane Exponents] as he started swimming for his life. However, the large barriers that he erected were instantly crushed by a tide of blood that rushed straight toward him. Not even the Twilight Chasm was a match to its ferocity, let alone Zac's own defenses.

It wasn't just a matter of volume, though the enormous sanguine river was massive enough to drown the whole cage of [Profane Seal] in an instant if it so desired. It also contained extremely high-grade

insights, insights that completely crushed his own Fragment of the Coffin. It was so far beyond what he had felt when fighting Yanub Mettleleaf, to the point that Zac guessed she had not only infused the river with multiple Dao Branches, but also empowered them through some extremely powerful braiding method.

Perhaps she even used the Dao Arrays that Catheya had mentioned once. Even worse, it was just like Catheya had guessed; Uona didn't appear any more restricted by the Twilight Energy than he did. At least he hoped that was the case. If not, she was simply a terror at a level he only encountered in Iz Tayn before.

Zac knew he was completely outmatched, but he obviously wasn't willing to just give up like that. He steadied his mind as he started channeling his Miasma into his movement skill. Meanwhile, he used the chains of [Love's Bond] to increase his speed by slamming into the mountain wall and dragging himself forward. The enormous river was still gradually catching up, and Zac knew he had no option.

The channeling was finally complete, and he disappeared into a puff of energy as the world slowed down to a crawl. Painful currents ripped into his abyssal form, but Zac forcibly kept the skill going as he started creating more distance to the blood river. However, Zac only managed to increase the distance by a few hundred meters before his mind screamed of danger.

He didn't even get the chance to react before a lance of blood shot out from the river and pierced through his form with impossible speed. Zac felt like his whole body was on fire as he was forcibly dragged back into his normal state, and he felt a wave of despair as he looked down at the stump where his right leg once had been.

A large trail of ichor was already forming behind him, and his vision had threatened to close in on him. It was extremely lucky he had only been hit in the leg rather than his heart or head. If he were less fortunate, he'd be a real corpse instead of just an undead.

But Zac suddenly heard a snicker within the blood river as it slowly crept closer, and it dawned on him - Uona was toying with him.

He didn't know why, but the snicker made rage overtake his dread, and he immediately stopped swimming for his life. The remnant's influence on his mental state had been mostly averted as his soul cultivation proceeded over the past years, but the voices calling for destruction once appeared in the back of his mind.

Perhaps it was because of the mockery, perhaps it was because his body was in an agitated state after using the Mark of Creation. And this time, Zac didn't try to push away the poisonous thoughts of destruction. Escape was clearly futile, so he had to change tactics.

If she wouldn't let him go, then she could just go ahead and die.

He wasn't someone she could toy with without getting burnt herself. Fury burned in his chest, fueling the torrential streams of energy that once more entered his shoulders. This time the goal wasn't to create a bridge between himself and the weird egg, but rather to annihilate that woman in one go.

The energy kept accumulating in his chest, but he forcibly kept it condensed inside his body as he kept moving away. The problem with the Annihilation Sphere was his difficulty to properly deliver the strike.

Another spear shot out from the river, and it hit even after he tried to dodge. Zac grit his teeth as he saw his left hand get dragged away by the current, forcibly keeping the process going even through the all-consuming pain.

Zac suddenly appeared right on top of the river thanks to the teleport of [Profane Seal], and a massive sphere formed between his right hand and his grisly stump as he felt a burning pain spread across his face and neck. He pushed every morsel of Annihilation Energy he had accumulated in his soul into the sanguine waters and used his rage and pain as the fuse.

The response was immediate as a huge chunk of it simply disappeared into an orb of nothingness while the rest of the sanguine river was pushed to a boiling point. It didn't even last for half a second before it collapsed, the blood swallowed by the currents which had been kept at bay until now.

A bloodied form emerged from the waters, her state even more pathetic than Zac's own. She was missing one of her arms along with a chunk of her torso, and she had lost one whole leg to boot. Even the parts that had avoided the Annihilation Sphere were covered in weird cracks that complemented the tendrils of pain that spread from Zac's head down to his shoulders.

But she was still alive.

The four chains of [Love's Bond] instantly shot toward weak spots for a quick kill, but Uona's closed eyes opened as she stared at him with confusion, pain, and vengeance. Sanguine Eyes met Zac's abyssal orbs, and the Twilight Chasm shuddered as an ocean of blood destroyed the mangled body of Uona and everything within a thousand meters.

Zac was right at the epicenter, and he only managed to resist for an instant before everything turned black.