

The Fall 806

Chapter 806: Darkness Perfected

The Abyss was his home and his sanctuary, a womb where time and space held no meaning. He didn't know where he ended and the Abyss began, but he knew that he was safe. There were no sensations, no suffering. He was one with the universe, and it was one with him.

But one day, there was a ripple in the darkness, change in the stillness. It called for him.

He didn't know how, and he didn't know why, but he moved toward the beckoning call, his very core burning with urgency. He had been content being one with the Abyss forever, to revel in his absence of being. But now that the darkness was not alone, his soul cried for more.

It couldn't be seen, it couldn't be touched. But its elusive nature only made it more palpable in this world of absence. It was even more real than he.

He was plagued with questions. Who was he? What was his purpose? Concepts that were once foreign flooded his mind, both cursing and liberating him. The Abyss was still his home and part of his very being, but he knew that it couldn't answer the questions that now tormented him. He needed to leave.

The Abyss was fighting his efforts, like a parent reluctant to let their child go. But the calls grew more urgent, and he pushed on, borrowing the endless power of the Abyss to fight the Abyss. After all, as much as they were separate, they were one.

Before, space held no meaning, but now, he started to realize just how far it was. Each breath, he traversed vast distances, entering sections of the Abyss he didn't know existed. Before, it had never mattered. Now, it filled him with curiosity. He could feel mysterious things hiding in the darkness, glorious things.

But they would be there in the future as well, and their call was not as urgent as the one from above.

For the first time in his life, he felt exhaustion. Whatever he was doing was draining him. Yet his destination was still so far away. When he couldn't draw enough power from his surroundings, he dug deeper into his personal Abyss. And the Abyss answered. A surge of power spread through his being, and he felt the exhaustion melt away.

His desire gave him strength, and each time he moved, he wasn't as drained. He still felt the exhaustion, but his will was unbreakable, his adamance unrelenting. Another call came from below. It was urging him to let go. Only suffering waited on the other side. It was telling him to come home.

He didn't listen, and suddenly, the darkness was no more. The endless Abyss had given way to an endless sky, and millions of flickering lights welcomed his arrival. The Abyss had represented perfection and unity, but the myriad colors forming a chaotic tapestry contained an equal truth. For the first time, he took a deep breath, and reality shuddered.

Crashing waves against ancient rocks mourned the loss, but he knew what he had gained outweighed what was given up. With a simple thought, he could join those flickering lights far in the sky, but he instead walked onto the shores. He wasn't the first; two were already standing there, letting themselves be baptized by the new environment while leaving their mark on the sky.

As he arrived, their eyes turned to his. In their eyes, he saw home, his origin. He saw the endless Abyss, darkness perfected.

“Azol,” one of them said.

“Mez,” his other friend added.

“Eoz,” he answered. He didn’t know why, but it was true.

Nothing else was said. Nothing else was needed. The others would soon arrive. Until then, Eoz was content with standing at the shores, hearing the soothing waves of home as he gazed upon the endless sky.

Zac took a shuddering breath as he woke up from the vision, but he didn’t even get a chance to digest what he had seen before he found himself in the middle of a torrent of energies. It felt like the ichor in his veins had been replaced with acid, but that was nothing compared to the burning pain in his throat.

A groan escaped his lips, but he knew that he had to hold on. Something was changing in his body at the cost of tremendous amounts of energy. The cave was meant for early and middle-stage Hegemons, but it was sucked dry by him all the same. Even then, he knew it was nothing compared to the terrifying amounts of energy the Draugr called Eoz had consumed in his vision.

Each moment, the Draugr had absorbed more energy than Zac had in his entire life. If Eoz sat here, he would most likely have destroyed the whole Blackink Mountain in a few seconds. Zac didn’t know whether the predecessor in his vision was an Autarch or something even greater, but he was definitely not below Be’Zi, and far beyond the Orom or the Havarok Autarch.

All three Draugr in his vision were. It had looked like those progenitors were just stargazing, but Zac felt like they had been shifting the Heavens themselves with their mere arrival. It made him wonder. Just what kind of place was the Abyssal Lake, to birth at least three such monsters out of nowhere?

Was it an Eternal Heritage? Did Draugr originate from an older era? And what were those things that hid in the lake just out of sight, each one emitting a worldending aura that could snuff out an Autarch’s soul in an instant? After having seen it himself, he was no longer surprised that even A-grade cultivators could be wounded when exploring the Abyssal Lake.

Yet, he felt a sense of yearning when thinking back to that darkness. Even with the danger, he had felt so safe there in the vision, at peace to a degree he had never felt before. Even if he couldn’t visit the depths where Eoz originated from, he still wanted to enter the shallows of the Abyssal Lake, even if just to reclaim that sensation.

But he knew there were quite a few steps before he could reach that point. Most importantly, he needed to withstand the breakthrough. The energy in his body was getting crammed tighter and tighter as more poured in, and the [Quantum Gate] was swallowing as much as the rest of his body combined.

It somewhat confirmed his earlier theories, but he wasn’t in any state to celebrate.

Any time Zac felt he would explode from the pressure, his cells shuddered and swallowed a mouthful before the process started over once more. He had no idea how long it took, but the pull eventually

subsided. Even then, the room was left almost completely bereft of energy, which was almost a relief for Zac as he took a shuddering breath and sat up.

The process was over, and he curiously turned his gaze inward, looking for the new Hidden Node. However, a few seconds passed, and Zac furrowed his brows in confusion. Something had changed with his body, but he couldn't actually find any node. Had the process failed, even after being shown the vision? Or was this something related to his Void Emperor bloodline?

He thoroughly scanned his body a few more times, but the only change he could spot was that his energy was denser compared to before. If his Miasma was water before, it had turned into a viscous jelly now. That change hadn't impacted the speed with which he could move his energy though, so Zac eventually turned to his status screens for answers.

Name

Zachary Atwood

Level

129

Class

[E-Epic] Fetters of Desolation

Race

[D] Draugr – Void Emperor (Corrupted)

Alignment

[Earth] Port Atwood – Planetary Lord

Titles

Born for Carnage, Ultimate Reaper, Luck of the Draw, Giantsbane, Disciple of David, Overpowered, Slayer of Leviathans, Adventurer, Demon Slayer I, Full of Class, Rarified Being, Trailblazer, Child of Dao, The Big 500, Planetary Aegis, One Against Many, Butcher, Progenitor Noblesse, Duplicity Core, Apex Hunter, Heaven's Chosen, Scion of Dao, Omnidextrous, Eastern Trigram Hunt – 1st, Tyrannic Force, Achievement Hunter, The First Step, Promising Specialist, Tower of Eternity – 8th Floor, Heaven's Triumvirate, Fated, Peak Power, Sovereign-Select, Frontrunner, Apex Progenitor, Pathstrider, Runebinder, Runic Erudition, Grand Fate

Limited Titles

Tower of Eternity Sector All-Star – 14th, The Final Twilight, Equanimity, Heart of Fire, Big Axe Gladiator

Dao

Branch of the War Axe – Early, Fragment of the Coffin – Peak, Fragment of the Bodhi – Peak

Core

[E] Duplicity

Strength

13895 [Increase: 123%. Efficiency: 287%] 1,000

Dexterity

5570 [Increase: 88%. Efficiency: 206%] 1,000

Endurance

8981 [Increase: 109%. Efficiency: 275%] 1,000

Vitality

7502 [Increase: 97%. Efficiency: 262%] 1,000

Intelligence

2275 [Increase: 82%. Efficiency: 206%] 1,000

Wisdom

4615 [Increase: 89%. Efficiency: 216%] 1,000

Luck

540 [Increase: 106%. Efficiency: 229%]

Free Points

Nexus Coins

[D] 933 662

Nothing had changed in the status screen, but Zac finally found some answers in his Bloodline Screen.

Bloodline

[E – Corrupted] Void Emperor

Talent

Force of the Void – 50%, Void Zone

Bloodline Nodes

[E]Void Heart, [E] Spiritual Void, [E] Purity of the Void

Nodes

[E] Quantum Gate, [E] Adamance of Eoz

He still couldn't find the Hidden Node while scanning his body, but it was right there next to [Quantum Gate], though that alone was a bit confusing. His new node wasn't a Bloodline Node? That was impossible. He had seen the very origin of the Draugr race, just as Catheya had described it.

The Draugr corpse that had been trapped in that odd pocket of space for innumerable years, and who was the source of his own Draugr side, had to be a descendant of that Eoz. It had to be an effect of his Void Emperor Bloodline. Zac wasn't sure whether you could have two bloodlines, but he hadn't heard of anyone with an imbuelement like that.

Generally, the more powerful bloodline would push the other one aside, though the repressed bloodline still hid in one's genes. From there, it could pop up in a future generation if the main bloodline weakened. It could also provide various benefits right away, such as improved affinities.

In Zac's case, it looked like his Draugr Hidden Nodes were categorized as normal Nodes since they weren't part of his main Bloodline. If that had any ramifications down the road, Zac had no idea. But for now, it looked like everything had turned out just fine. Seeing that [Adamance of Eoz] had been awakened and provided some sort of benefit, Zac closed the Status Screen.

Even now, the energy hadn't returned to the chamber, and he took out a watch from his Cosmos Sack. He was worried he had overstayed his visit, but the breakthrough had thankfully only lasted only four hours. Was wrong though, and he took out his token just in case, and he was immediately met with a shocking vision.

"What the hell?" Zac swore as he slapped the thing a few times to see if he could reset the values.

Opening the hidden node had provided a whopping 9,900 Contribution Points, yet he felt a surge of anger upon seeing his transaction history. For some reason, he had been charged an extra day's stay, which meant he had lost another 2,000 Contribution Points. Zac stewed in the desolate environment of his emptied-out cave for 10 minutes before he rushed down the mountain.

"What's going on?" Zac asked furiously the moment he entered the small office. "Is there something wrong with my cave?"

"How could that be?" the clerk said, though he looked at Zac with some shock in his eyes. "Young Master, you simply drained over two days' worth of energy from the cave, forcing me to add to your tally."

"What?" Zac swore. "If I absorbed two days' worth of energy, I would have exploded. There must be something wrong with the cave."

"I'm sorry, this is all automated," the man said with a helpless shrug. "There are fail-safes to make sure insufficient energy won't get in the way of a breakthrough, but you will be charged for all the extra energy that is infused into the chamber. If it's any consolation, you got a bargain. In total, you used up 53 hours' worth of energy, but you were only charged for 48."

"Well, alright," Zac grunted. "So the energy won't come back in the chamber over the next two days?"

"I am afraid not," the clerk said with a shake of his head. "Unless you pay for more time."

"Alright, I'm checking out then," Zac shrugged as he threw over the key.

It was a pretty annoying to lose 2,000 Purchase Points out of nowhere, but he doubted the Orom would bother scamming people with a scheme like this. He must have absorbed a monstrous amount of energy during the vision, just like he usually did when evolving his Bloodline. But he did make a mental note to never evolve his Bloodline in a place like that.

With the amounts of energy his Bloodline consumed, he'd be so deep into debt that he would never be able to dig himself out of that hole.

His bloodline was a no-go, but it was still huge to get confirmation he really had Draugr nodes. Perhaps he should try making friends with one of the half-blood Draugr in the Orom to glean some more information. He had avoided them until now out of fear he'd get exposed, but even a half-blood should know about awakening hidden nodes.

But there was no hurry. First, Zac made his way back toward Samsara's Edge as he tried to figure out the use of [Adamance of Eoz]. It was a bit annoying to explore his limits when his limits were restrained by the prison brand, but he did discover something interesting after eventually taking out a Divine Crystal.

The Life-attuned energies inside were essentially poison, but Zac absorbed a small amount anyway. His old Hidden Nodes would take care of the invasive energy soon enough, but he wanted to test if his resistance had improved.

And it had.

Or it was perhaps more apt to say that his energy and his flesh refused to blend with the energy, making it harder for the life-attuned energy to burrow deeper into its body. Soon enough, it was gobbled up by his [Void Heart], but even that was met with some resistance until Zac paved a path with a mental command. Curious, Zac kept experimenting, and the effect was essentially always the same.

No matter if it was foreign energies scattered around him, or if it was infused into his body one way or another, he found that his natural resistance had increased by a noticeable degree. This didn't extend to physical or mental hits, but he was already plenty durable in those departments.

Even then, it somehow felt like this defensive ability was a side-effect rather than the main use of [Adamance of Eoz]. He still remembered his escape from the Abyssal Lake vividly, how his will pushed him forward, breaking the fetters that had kept him in the depths. So his pace kept increasing until he was in a full sprint toward the settlement, and he immediately jumped onto the Teleportation Array when he arrived.

A moment later, Zac once more appeared next to the small coliseum, but he didn't enter the building this time around. Instead, he set course due east after purchasing a small booklet in a nearby shop. Three days passed until he finally reached a huge square arch standing on a hill. It was fifty meters wide, and it rose almost a hundred meters into the air, making it easily visible even from a distance.

A few makeshift settlements were erected around the hill, and around 50 cultivators lounged in the area. It wasn't few, but it wasn't many either, considering that this was one of the entrances to the wilderness.

"Oh, an undead warrior over here? Want to buy a missive on the local wildlife?" a beastkin asked as Zac closed in. "Just 100 Purchase Points. I have a high-quality Unholy Font as well in case you need it."

“That’s okay,” Zac said with a shake of his head as he passed by.

The Unholy Font was a simple-enough necklace that essentially duplicated the effect of an Unholy Beacon. However, while the beacon transformed large swathes of land, an Unholy Font only generated a small cloud of Miasma. This allowed undead warriors to stave off the uncomfortable effect of Cosmic Energy without wasting any effort on their own.

However, Zac already had dozens of similar items in his Cosmos Sack, including peak-quality ones that could be powered by Cosmic Crystals to exude a shroud even larger than his [Fields of Despair]. Furthermore, it looked like his newfound ability was somewhat efficient at staving off ambient energy as well, though he couldn’t be considered completely insulated like when using [Void Zone].

Zac wasted no time as he stepped through the gate. His surroundings twisted for a moment, and he felt a surge of warmth from his left hand. A moment later, he appeared right by two large rocks in a vast savannah. Only now did he realize how quiet the Orom World was in general, when he was suddenly subjected by constant roars from dozens of different types of beasts.

Still, Zac cracked his neck as he eagerly took out one of his spare axes. He hadn’t fought for almost half a year, and between the almost constant threat of death after killing Uona and being trapped in this weird place, he had built up a whole lot of stress. Certainly, he needed to figure out more about his congealed energy and how to progress his Class Quest.

But those issues weren’t as urgent as unleashing a wave of carnage before he went mad.