

The Fall 833

Chapter 833: Little Chaos

Zac felt the first wisp of Chaos form when the two streams of energy from his shoulders finally couldn't resist the mounting pressure, but it was still not stable. Or stable in the sense that chaos was stable, anyway. For better or worse, the remnants had still plenty of energy to spare. They had already ceased fighting in his aperture, now more interested in fleeing than vanquishing their foe.

Unfortunately for them, they had become part of something greater as their energy returned to its origin.

As bad as the remnants had it, Zac wasn't much better off. It almost sounded like someone was ripping dried parchments as painful cracks kept opening across his body, starting from his forehead and covering his whole torso. The more energy that was dragged into his shoulders, the more damage he had to withstand.

The painful process was pretty much running on autopilot by now, with the small wisp of chaos growing in both size and depths of its truths. Soon enough, it would be seized by the System above, and he could already feel its consciousness descend on the Orom World, filled with greed and jubilation.

He could no longer move, yet this was his window of opportunity.

As the ball of unadulterated chaos formed in his chest, he roused a huge amount of mental energy and sent it over. Since the System didn't want to bargain this time around, he would simply take what he needed. The moment he saw his chance, Zac pounced, dragging out a small wisp of Chaos from the accumulating ball.

It put up a ferocious struggle, and it felt like the small mote resisted being controlled on a fundamental level. It was Chaos – uncontrollable and unpredictable by its very nature. Having dragged the small wisp out from the growing pattern, Zac knew it wouldn't last long. Soon enough, it would slip through his fingers.

So he urgently pushed it through his pathways, ignoring the damage it was wrecking on his body as it moved toward the Prison Brand on his arm. This was a test of sorts, and Zac looked on with anticipation as the two clashed. Or rather didn't clash.

The spatial barrier that protected the Prison Brand from the Oblivion Energy before might as well not have been there as the mote of Chaos passed through without issue. Zac couldn't comprehend the concept of its movement at all – it was like it both formed a bridge and annihilated the space between at the same time, something that made no sense.

A moment later, the pattern on his wrist started to twist and transform. Some parts simply disappeared into nothingness, whereas others mutated in unpredictable ways. It realized it was being tampered with, but between the lack of ambient energy and [Void Zone], it was having problems rousing a proper response. Thanks to that, it simply fell apart before it could do anything.

Zac breathed out in relief, previously afraid the brand would explode just before getting destroyed. He had been prepared to lose his arm if need be and regrow it later, but it looked like he wouldn't have to

worry about that. As the mark faded, Zac also felt his body erupt with power, his aura rising to an unprecedented degree.

Gone were the chains sealing his strength and sapping him of momentum. He felt unburdened, unhindered, and free. But a golden bolt of lightning slammed into the ground the next moment, reminding him that his task was only partly done. Zac took a steadying breath before once more controlling the wisp of Chaos in his arm, once more channeling it through his body.

Between his limiters being removed and the little mote shielding him from the pressure above, he could somewhat move again, just like back in the City of Ancients. However, every second he stayed in this state was more damage wrought on his body, not to mention the growing ball of chaos he could only delay for so long.

Thankfully, his escape was both planned and prepared, so Zac infused some energy into a ring on his hand, taking out an odd contraption from within. It was a tightly bound ball of crystals, held together by rope and talismans. It shone with four different colors; aquamarine and gold from Divine Crystals and Miasma Crystals, along with pale purple and mottled black for Temporal and Spatial Crystals.

A bomb that would render even the mad Ishiate Tinkerers weak in the knees.

Dozens of attuned Cosmic Crystals rigged to blow was enough to even fill a Hegemon with trepidation, but there was no way it would be able to actually harm the Orom. Thankfully, that wasn't Zac's goal anyway, though he still wasn't sure his idea would work.

He was running out of time. The remnants in his mind were almost completely drained, and the anomaly in his chest had begun stabilizing. The urgency in the sky had grown even stronger as well, and lightning was incinerating lotus leaves by the thousands. If he didn't take the Glimpse of Chaos out soon, Zac was afraid that the system would simply blast his chest open and take it out.

Before that, he needed to use it to enable his escape.

He had considered various ways to use the uncontrollable energy of Chaos to leave the Orom World, and he had essentially come up with two solutions. The first was to stall the formation of the glimpse as long as possible while finishing one of the teleportation arrays. With the Glimpse of Chaos, he would then distort the spatial laws around him and teleport away, perhaps even infusing the array itself with the power of chaos.

If it worked, he would be gone, and Zac doubted the Orom would dare follow after the System had made an appearance.

The second idea was to cause a weakness in the fabric of space, blasting open a tear to another dimension with the power of Chaos. After having escaped, he would then quickly teleport away before the Orom caught up.

The moment he saw the fiery sky, he had chosen to go with the second option. Teleporting from within the Orom was risky, but he had figured that the System's presence in the Orom World would keep the space fish in check. However, something was clearly going on outside the Orom as well, and Zac didn't dare enter a Teleportation array in these kinds of conditions.

It would be a truly ignoble death, being ripped into shreds the moment he activated the teleporter because space all around the Orom had become too unstable to support teleportation. Instead, Zac would make his way to a neighboring dimension before using the array, reducing the risk that the spatial turbulence of two Autarchs fighting would take him out.

Zac tried to stem the drain of energy from the remnants as best as he could while he activated the talisman array on the crystal bomb. At the same time, he forcibly snatched a second wisp of chaos from the growing ball in his chest while infusing the bomb with the old one he was fast losing control of.

Turbulent waves of energy started to radiate from the shimmering ball of crystals. Zac ran for his life, using the chaos-influenced [Earthstrider] to phase hundreds of meters away. Even then, he was flung into the air while it felt like reality itself broke. Life and Death clashed with Time and Space while the wisp of Chaos fanned the flames, forming a singularity of incomprehensible might.

What little remained of the poor island was ripped to shreds from the tumultuous waves of raw energies, and the very laws of physics were disintegrating. Zac slammed into the waters just before a blade of temporal turbulence whipped past his previous position, and he almost lost control of the budding Glimpse of Chaos in his body.

Another bolt of lightning confirmed Zac had very little time remaining, so he roused himself and breached the surface of the waters before returning to the spot the island once stood. There was no spatial tear at the heart of the explosion, as much as a wound in space itself that radiated unpredictable waves of power.

Right now it was just turbulence rather than a gate to another dimension, but that was Zac's aim from the start. He arduously pushed against the heavenly pressure to reach the epicenter of the blast, the single wisp of Chaos finding it harder and harder to withstand the mounting pressure from above. By this point, the System's desire had almost turned into a corporeal form, and Zac knew its patience had reached a limit.

At that very moment, Zac felt a second pressure sweep over the area, and Zac froze in place as he stilled his aura before igniting the mote of Chaos, forming a small shimmering sphere around himself. He didn't know why he knew how to do something like that. It was like he inherently understood a lot of things with chaos when in touch with it. Yet the moment the Glimpse left, his comprehension would quickly fade.

It was just in time. The presence was just too powerful, and he didn't have any other means to hide than relying on chaos. That little bangle on his arm would definitely fail in hiding him from the gaze of an Autarch. Thankfully, the scan passed him by after stopping a moment on the spatial wound, seemingly not having found what it looked for.

The energy left in the remnants was all but a trickle by this point, while his mind was drained and his body was covered in lacerations. However, Zac had formed his third Glimpse of Chaos, this one surpassing the previous two in intensity. Zac pushed the turbulent chaos out from his chest, though he kept two final wisps behind by force. That scan had scared him straight, and he needed them to move in either case.

The benefits of his empowered soul were quickly showing themselves. Last time, Zac had been forced to bargain with the System for just two wisps, yet this time he was able to rip four from the glimpse before he reached his limits. Who knew, the next time he might be able to seize eight, and further temper both his soul and his body.

With two wisps of Chaos using his body as a playground, the pressure was greatly alleviated. Even then, Zac found himself faced with another threat – the endless mysteries hidden within the Glimpse itself. It was right there, no more than a meter from his face, its ever-shifting form hinting at something amazing – something that didn't even exist in the current cultivation world.

It followed no rules, not even its own. Yet it held supreme power to both create and destroy, to subvert fate and make the impossible possible. Not only that, it contained clues to elevating both his Daos and techniques to unfathomable levels, where he would walk unopposed among everyone in his grade. With this-

A bolt of lightning cut his reverie short, and Zac's heart threatened to jump out of his mouth as a golden pillar slammed down on his position. The bolt tried to wrest control of the blob hovering in front of him, yet Chaos resisted, unwilling to be contained. Unable to, even, based on its most fundamental nature.

Thankfully, the collision didn't actually harm Zac, and there almost seemed to be a tacit understanding between the two supreme forces. Eventually, the System reluctantly gave up, but a second strike was already brewing above. Taking advantage of the lull, Zac enacted his plan, if you could call it that.

He stretched out his hands and willed the Glimpse of Chaos into the spatial wound.

There was no explosion as Zac had expected. Instead, there was just a ripple before an enormous grey swirl appeared, stretching over fifty meters into the air. It somehow managed to steal terrifying amounts of energy from the neighboring realms, and both the enormous femur and the golden Boddhisatva dimmed as a result.

Even torrential streams of Life and Death were dragged over from the depths of the Orom World, once more drowning the parched surroundings in ambient energy. Seeing as that energy was previously siphoned by the Orom itself, it had probably been robbed as well, and an angry earthquake indicated his guess was correct.

The swirl kept growing, but a second blast from above blinded Zac as the System repeated its attempt to swallow the Glimpse. This attempt too was met with failure, and Zac inwardly celebrated having stored all his energy for years to give the chaos pattern an extra kick. Perhaps that would be the difference between success and failure with this mad scheme.

Not only did the golden bolt of lightning fail to absorb the Glimpse of Chaos, but some of its energy was even swallowed by the growing swirl. Along with everything else it had siphoned off, the chaotic anomaly had finally formed. His exit looked completely different from anything he had seen before, not resembling a spatial tear or a Teleportation Array in the slightest.

It was impossible to guess its shape as it was constantly shifting. But more importantly, the construct didn't seem to exist in the same three dimensions as Zac did. Just shifting his gaze made the whole thing twist on itself, like he was looking at it from a completely different angle.

It was odd and resisting comprehension, but Zac knew it would work. Being temporarily in tune with Chaos, he had a slight understanding of what this thing would do. It could best be described as a Chaos Gate – existing everywhere and nowhere at once. Spatial turbulence couldn't restrict it since it didn't actually move in the same sense as teleportation did.

Just as Zac was about to step inside, a shimmering pillar of gold slammed into the Glimpse of Chaos once more, threatening to rip the gate apart just as it formed. Zac's world turned white for an instant, and Zac rapidly blinked his eyes to regain his vision. Once more, the heavens had been rebuffed, but Zac felt the Glimpse would only resist one or two more blasts.

Before anything else, Zac threw a small bead into the shifting vortex of chaos. He had no idea where he'd end up on the other side, so he felt it was best to accomplish Heda's mission this way. Zac also wanted to see how seed fared upon entering the Chaos gate, but his eyes widened when the seed rapidly grew, forming a familiar figure.

'Thank you, little Chaos. Your display will live on in my dreams forever. I hope we meet again,' Heda's voice echoed out in his mind. 'Please take care of Vivi.'

With that, Heda was gone, whisked away god knows where. At least Zac believed that was the case. At the same time, Zac could sense fate congregating at his location. Were people rushing over because of the massive anomaly? Was someone coming to stop him? Or was it that powerful presence that was returning, most likely the Orom itself?

With an instantaneous burst, Zac activated [Earthstrider], and the chains of [Coffinbox] picked up the teleporter from where he left it on the shores before returning in an instant. He once more stood in front of the anomaly, and he couldn't help but feel hesitant as he looked at the growing ball of chaos. Even if his instincts told him that the thing was decently safe and that Heda seemed fine, what did he know?

Was this yet another case of the remnants filling him with hubris?

However, what choice did he have? Stay here and be converted, cooked, or recaptured? Absolutely not. Zac knew that risks would be involved, and he stepped forward before something changed, taking his chances that his Luck and his temporary understanding of Chaos would pull him through.

Just as Zac entered the odd anomaly while pushing the Glimpse of Chaos in front of him, he felt the ballooning blob of chaos dislodge from its position, slowly drifting toward Kaldor's tower. Zac hesitated for a bit, but he ultimately tried to impose his will, having it instead turn toward the life-attuned side. Rather than impacting Kaldor and Pavina, the shifty monk could deal with the fallout.

He knew he had been within a hair's breadth from falling to their scheme, where he almost turned to the heart-cleansing Sutras to overcome the Splinter of Oblivion's surprisingly difficult tribulation. Zac had a strong suspicion that the moment those sutras took root in his heart, he would forever have a connection to the Sangha and be unable to completely extricate himself from their control.

So he pushed deeper into the Chaos Gate with his Teleportation Array fastened to his back, narrowly dodging a blast of golden lightning from above. He wasn't trying to steal the ball of chaos from the System, he simply needed it to pave the way. As long as he carried this thing, he should be untrackable for everyone except the System itself.

However, a scream of danger made him turn around in fright. The bolt of lightning he narrowly avoided just now hadn't actually dissipated – it had followed him into the chaos. Zac felt the laws around him furiously resisting, but it ultimately couldn't withstand the barrage of the System itself. It might be Chaos, but it was just a small corner of that peak Dao.

Zac prayed it would resist a bit longer, and he sacrificed one of the wisps to stabilize his surroundings. The Orom World had already disappeared in the rear window, replaced by an endless grey. The further the Chaos Gate could take him, the better. However, it was like the gate had a consciousness of its own, and it had another idea – expel the reason for the lightning hounding it.

Something pushed him, and the gray expanse shattered as his surroundings were replaced by a golden radiance.

“What!” Zac blurted, looking around with alarm.

Out of all places in the multiverse – why had he been sent to a place like this?!