

The Fall 836

Chapter 836: Stacked

It almost felt like a dream when Zac stepped out from his teleportation room and stepped into his compound. Six years. It had been over six years since he left Earth with not a single update on the state of things, except for the notification that his followers had somehow accepted an incursion in his name.

Thankfully, there were no smoldering ruins or screams of battle greeting his return, indicating that things should be under control. It was something that had constantly worried him for the past month as he lay low at a remote corner of the Zecia sector.

He should have guessed that infusing a tool with Chaos would make its functionality unreliable.

Still, having appeared in a desolate spot at the edge of the Sector after weeks of being hurtled through some subdimension was far better than he could have hoped for from an item that would normally only work inside the sector itself. Unfortunately, large chaos-laden cracks had appeared all over the bangle, making Zac leery about using the thing again.

However, he didn't have much choice as he had been dropped off in the middle of space, and with air running out he had used the Teleportation Array on his back to teleport to a remote trading hub he had frequented before. He hadn't dared immediately return to Earth out of fear that the Orom, the golem, or Iz herself would show up at his doorstep.

Zac couldn't bring those monsters back to Earth, so he had rented a top-tier cultivation cave, once more reminded how amazingly cheap things were in this remote corner of the Multiverse. Every day he had spent cleansing himself of karma and looking for marks left in his body, trying to recover his broken and chaos-addled pathways as much as he could while keeping an eye on the sky.

When a month had passed, Zac figured people either wouldn't or couldn't come after him, and he had finally returned home. Zac immediately wanted to find someone, but a clap of thunder above his head made him look up with solemnity.

It had come, just as he expected. The gathering clouds didn't contain the vast indifference of the System, but rather the fury of the Boundless Heavens. Zac knew it hadn't come for him though, but rather for someone else; Alea. He had noticed something brewing over the past week as Zac gradually whittled down the Orom's seal on his Tool Spirit.

Perhaps by design, it was quite easy to deal with after having left the Orom World. After all, most of those who left were either scions with powerful backing or powerhouses who had confirmed their Daos in the limited environment of the Orom World. There was no point in angering these kinds of people.

However, as the layers of restrictions were removed one by one, Zac had felt that sense of premonition that fate was gathering on his location. He could somehow tell it was related to [Love's Bond], so he had eventually left the last layer of restrictions and hurried back home. As expected, she was breaking through.

For almost five years she had been digesting the enormous ball of blood and Oblivion, joined by Temporal Energy and continuously bolstered by the Ambient Energy inside the Orom World. And this

was as a Peak F-grade Spirit Tool. Her accumulations were shocking, and this step was long overdue. However, Zac hadn't expected a minor Lightning Tribulation to arrive because of this.

Then again, it was undeniable that [Love's Bond] was an unorthodox weapon, no matter if you talked about its origins or what it had fed on. Zac wondered if the same would happen to Verun in the future, considering the axe had been marked by pure life inside the Twilight Chasm.

A wave of hunger filled Zac's mind, and he didn't hesitate as he started emptying his Spatial Rings of anything he could think of. There were mountains of rare materials, from things he had found in the Spatial Rings in the Void to the supreme treasures he had found in the Twilight Ocean and Qi'Sar's treasury.

The piles kept growing as Zac took out one thing after another, just like when Alea's coffin was turned into a Spirit Tool the first time. Altogether, the value of the mounds surrounding the coffin was probably inching toward three million D-grade Nexus Coins, a ludicrous sum for an F-grade Spirit Tool. Even the passive energy the treasures leaked was enough to create a chaotic storm in the sky.

However, Alea didn't take too many of the treasures. First, she picked up the [Blackearth Steel] from Qi'Sar's treasury, the chains barely able to drag them toward the lid, along with the supreme-quality death-attuned wood Catheya had identified for him. Next, she picked up five other unnamed Death-attuned metals Zac had found in the Twilight Ocean, along with a few dozen Death-attuned natural treasures.

She did, however, leave Uona's corpse behind, though Zac did feel the axe on his waist perking up when he took the body out.

Seeing the decidedly one-sided nature of the materials, Zac was a bit surprised considering how she had feasted on Twilight Fruits for years. He had expected her to want at least some life-attuned materials to balance all that death, but it looked like he was wrong. Or had her needs changed after first being marked by Pure Death, and then swallowing Oblivion?

And if so, how would that impact her soul?

By the time Alea had finished gathering everything she needed, the sky was dark with tribulation clouds while purple clouds crackled. However, Zac was inwardly relieved when he sensed the clouds were decidedly weaker compared to the punishments he had endured to evolve his two Dao Branches.

The familiar rattle of chains moving echoed out through the area, but it was followed by a groaning sound Zac had only heard a few times; the opening of the thick coffin lid. Zac's heart beat an additional time as the lid swung almost completely wide open, but he couldn't see Alea's body at all. Instead, there was only vast darkness that almost reminded him of the Abyssal Lake.

For now, the darkness was only a shadow of the real thing, but was [Love's Bond] moving in that direction, toward the Abyssal Death of the Draugr? Was it he who had influenced her path that way? Or was it the System who had implanted the Spirit Tool with this path upon its creation, to make the coffin better match Zac's Draugr persona?

Zac didn't know what the truth was, and he didn't even know how to feel about it. So he could only look on with mixed emotions as tendrils of Darkness quickly consumed all the materials, dragging them into

the coffin like a hungry vortex. The lid quickly closed after that, but a dark shroud covered the Coffin as it rose into the air.

Alea had finished her preparations just in time, and the first bolt of purple lightning slammed into the coffin a moment later, instantly dispersing the darkness. The whole coffin shuddered as Zac felt a pang of pain in his mind, but he could sense that both Alea and the Spirit Tool itself had endured the first strike just fine. There was just a scorched spot on the lid and some small cracks across its surface.

The lid opened slightly again, releasing a second puff of darkness, this one even more condensed compared to the last. Unfortunately, just like Alea's defenses grew stronger, so did the bolts of lightning, and the second tribulation left deep cracks across the whole lid. Luckily, there should only be one more to go, and Zac was relieved to see the lid open a third time.

However, relief turned into confusion and fear as the ten-meter avatar of Alea's torso appeared, her black eyes staring up at the sky as she stretched her arms out in a familiar gesture.

"Are you crazy?!" Zac shouted with horror, but he didn't dare go closer. Doing so would just infuriate the Tribulation Cloud, making things harder for Alea. "Don't copy me! Absorbing that thing is extremely dangerous!"

However, Alea didn't seem to listen, and Zac could only pray she knew what she was doing. He looked on with worry as the final bolt of lightning descended, drenching the avatar in a sea of purple death. The demoness held on for a moment, but Zac was horrified to see that she eventually cracked and broke apart, absolutely incapable of containing the punishment with [Death's Embrace].

Zac felt like he was back on that mountaintop again, helplessly watching Alea's soul fall apart. The only thing keeping him from going crazy was his connection with the demoness. It was weakened, but her consciousness was still there, so he stayed his hand as he saw the coffin drag the fragmented pieces of the spirit back inside.

Along with a mote of lightning.

The Tribulation Lightning seemed infuriated, and it showered the whole coffin in lightning, completely obscuring Zac's vision. Thankfully, it only had so much energy to expend, and Zac sensed reluctance as the bolt dissipated. Left behind, was a pitch-black obelisk of condensed darkness, reminding Zac of the times [Verun's Bite] had enclosed itself in a bloody crystal.

'Soon,' Zac heard in his mind before the connection was cut.

"You just woke up and you're already going into seclusion again?" Zac helplessly muttered as he looked at the black cocoon, but he was inwardly awash with relief.

It looked like she had broken through successfully, and judging by the materials she had consumed, it was bound to be a big leap in power.

"Who goes there?!" a ferocious shout broke the calm just as it settled, and Zac looked over with bemusement to see a spectral apparition float over with furious momentum.

Or rather hide behind two hulking puppets that emitted the power that even surpassed the Half-Step Blacksmith golem he fought to open up the Dao Repository.

“My Lord! You’re back!” a surprised voice exclaimed as the ghost peered over the shoulder of one of its bodyguards.

“It’s been a while, Triv,” Zac smiled. “How are you?”

“Nothing to complain about, now that young master is back,” Triv said as he hurriedly flew over. “Your aura is like the radiant sun, and your return is like the parting of the clouds, a great-“

“Alright, alright,” Zac snorted. “What is it?”

“Incidentally, I was wondering if the young master has joined the Undead Empire? I was shocked to hear you once more met up with the noble Draugr mistress who visited our province a decade ago,” Triv said. “It truly is fated.”

“Well, she’s putting in a good word for me,” Zac smiled as he started carrying the black cocoon toward his courtyard. “I am not sure how things stand though. Things spiraled out of control a bit in Twilight Harbor, and I’ve been stuck in an isolated world for the past four years. How is the situation on Earth? You guys actually started an Incursion?”

“There have been some problems among the dreamers, from what I’ve heard,” Triv slowly said. “Unrest on the main continent of this world. Infighting, seizing territory. Of course, no one has dared make any big moves even with master gone and much of our forces being occupied on the other world. But I hear there are rumors of you succumbing off-world, and there is just a matter of time the elites of this world start fighting for your supposedly empty throne.”

“Well, as long as nothing has happened, it’s fine,” Zac nodded before he stopped and looked at his butler with a frown. “Wait, the elites are still offworld? What’s going on?”

Zac had always assumed that the Incursion would be over by now. Over four years had passed since it started, far longer than the situation on Earth to reach a critical point. If his people still hadn’t returned, it usually meant one of two things; either, they had been eradicated by the natives or competing factions.

If not, they had been dragged into a drawn-out battle, which also indicated the situation had turned thorny.

“They are still there, though the situation is mostly stable from what I hear,” Triv sighed. “The Invasion Gate has long since stabilized, and the elites spend most of their time on the other side. The level restriction has been increased all the way to level 150 already, but it is still very expensive to go back and forth. So most stay there permanently since the environment over there is still far superior as there is still some lingering Origin Dao.”

Zac wasn’t surprised. Even he had felt just how much worse the environment became after Earth lost its last specks of Origin Dao, and the situation was far more palpable to cultivators who depended on their affinities and meditation to seize Dao Seeds.

For example, among the demons who joined the Azh’Rezak incursion, only a handful had Dao Seeds by the time they arrived, but after a few years on Earth, almost seventy percent had formed their first Dao Seed, and a few had formed multiple. And that was despite the Dimensional Seed siphoning off a good chunk of the Origin Dao the System awarded Earth.

If he was a cultivator, he wouldn't want to spend any time on Earth either as long as there were Origin Dao to be had somewhere else.

"Is young master interested in heading over?" Triv asked.

"Soon, but not right now," Zac slowly said after some thought.

Zac wanted to meet everyone, but now that he had finally returned, he suddenly felt extremely exhausted like he had been carrying a heavy load for years. He needed to settle down a bit first and stabilize his mental state. Besides, while he had managed to repair most of his broken pathways the month he stayed off-world, he had reopened some internal wounds during the teleportation just now.

"For now, I need to recuperate for a while," Zac continued. "It took some effort escaping the place where I was trapped. Can you compile a report of all major events and changes since I left? Oh, and don't tell anyone I am back, except Abby and Adran. Come back in three hours."

"Certainly," Triv hurriedly nodded, and he was gone in a flash a moment later.

Seeing the ghost disappear while the two guardian golems, who clearly had been upgraded somehow, lumbered off, Zac turned toward his courtyard. As he walked through the large compound, he was filled with a mix of emotions. At a secluded spot between two trees, Zac spotted an antique telephone booth painted pink, left behind by Thea during the time she lived in this place.

The whole compound was filled with these kinds of things, especially the area around his living quarters. Seeing the installment made Zac stop for a while with a sigh. Close to seven years had passed since Leandra returned, her appearance an even deadlier calamity than the Tribulation Lightning.

The hurt had slowly faded over the past years, but the guilt remained. Zac still wondered if Thea would have been caught in the crosshairs if he had been more forthright about the secrets he kept. He should have realized that Thea would have noticed the large research labs and factories underground, no matter how ingenious Kenzie's means to hide them were.

Zac hesitated a bit, but he ultimately chose to keep the telephone booth and the other items where they were as he returned to his courtyard. The walled-in mansion was exactly as he had left it, except for two additions. The Ambient Energy had increased by a noticeable margin, no doubt the result of Triv's hard work. Zac couldn't exactly put his finger on it, but he was reasonably certain that the trees in the whole inner area of Port Atwood had been rearranged to become a massive formation.

And his courtyard was in the eye of the formation, the hotspot for ambient energy.

The second change was that the courtyard had more than doubled in size, adding a second building drenched in Miasma. However, this half was shrouded in high-powered arrays, and it looked like a hedged-off garden from the outside. Zac guessed that Triv was afraid Zac would forget or discard his undead side, so it added this place.

The encased coffin wasn't absorbing any energy at the moment, but he still chose to leave it at the heart of the miasmatic zone of his courtyard just in case. After that, he took out one of the folding chairs from his old camper and sat down, taking a deep breath as he took in the moment.

He really was back. Finally.

The road had been far bumpier than he had expected, no matter if you looked at the Twilight Ascent or what came next. In return, the gains were almost unfathomable for a trip that was initially just meant as a shopping spree to look for skills and some way to upgrade his undead side to D-grade race.

He had already looked at his screen dozens of times the past month now that it wasn't restricted any longer, but he still couldn't resist taking another look. Sometimes it almost felt like a delirious fever-dream thinking back on what he had been through over the past years, but numbers don't lie.

Name

Zachary Atwood

Level

145

Class

[E-Epic] Edge of Arcadia

Race

[D] Human – 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, Branch of the Kalpataru – Early, Branch of the Pale Seal – Early

Core

[E] Duplicity

Strength

18177 [Increase: 123%. Efficiency: 287%]

Dexterity

7526 [Increase: 88%. Efficiency: 206%]

Endurance

14540 [Increase: 124%. Efficiency: 287%]

Vitality

12512 [Increase: 112%. Efficiency: 273%]

Intelligence

3058 [Increase: 82%. Efficiency: 206%]

Wisdom

5995 [Increase: 89%. Efficiency: 216%]

Luck

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

Free Points

Nexus Coins

[D] 933 662

As looked at the numbers, a smile slowly spread across his face like it had many times before. He knew he was just an ant compared to the old monsters littering the Multiverse, but he had to admit – he was getting kind of stacked.