

The Fall 993

[Chapter 993 - Resentment and Punishment](#)

The lightning struck the mound every twenty minutes, so it wouldn't be long. However, Zac and the others were forced to continuously back further and further away. The mound's aura was continuously rising, creating a domain that even Zac had trouble dealing with. No wonder lightning had to strike so often. If it didn't, this place would unleash surges twice an hour. Or possibly generate something even worse.

Zac wasn't even sure what would happen if he struck the mound while it contained such vast amounts of resentment. It could lead to an explosion that swallowed them all. Catheya was right; better let the formation in the sky pave the way before making a move.

Ogras and Catheya weren't idle while Zac prepared to strike. Ogras kept watch of the surroundings while sending shadows and captured souls to investigate the mound and what was going on underground. He didn't find out much, except that the mound was just as dangerous as it looked. Any shadow that tried to dig into the hill had to be sacrificed before Sinner's Lament's extremely evil taint rushed into the demon's body. And any spirit that entered the ground was profaned to the point the [Shadewar Flag] soon lost control.

Catheya performed her own experiments, mostly recording the energy signature of the mound while trying various means to lock onto it. Eventually, Zac saw an array of engraved Sinner Crystals light up, their tips pointing toward the Sinner Mound.

"Yes!" Catheya exclaimed.

"Just in time," Zac smiled as he glanced at the rumbling sky. "You're done with this one?"

"I've found the signature," Catheya nodded. "I can't guarantee my solution is perfect, but it should work. I can keep refining it over the next days from here on out."

"Perfect," Zac said, cracking his neck. "We can't stand around this thing much longer anyway."

Zac hadn't reached his limits yet, but he could tell Catheya and Ogras were struggling with the accumulated resentment. Its concentration was just terrifying next to the mound, even compared to the surges they'd endured. It was like something prevented the resentment from turning into wraiths here, instead remaining a blighted miasma.

Ogras's eyes were already tinted with red, and Zac could tell he was struggling with containing murderous impulses. They had to constantly rotate their Dao to remove the filth of the environment, but who knew what kind of sequela this kind of thing left behind?

"We should create a sealed chamber after this to cleanse the filth," Catheya sighed. "Might even need a visit to the Eastern Qi Pools after this task."

"A spa day doesn't sound too bad right about now," Zac laughed.

The sludge pouring out from the mound had already reached their ankles, and it was pitch-black in contrast to the dark red of the previous surges. It almost felt like something was nibbling at his feet, but Zac didn't avert his eye from the storm in the sky. A minute at most.

Finally, a lightning bolt as thick as an ancient oak came crashing down. The mound wasn't to be outdone, and a pillar of resentment rose to block. Ultimately, Sinner Mound couldn't match the wrath of the skies, and the pillar was ripped apart after exhausting less than a third of the lightning. The bolt continued down, drowning the whole area in blinding light.

A tsunami of crackling gunk was thrown off from the mound, but a wall of ice rose to prevent it from swallowing them. The light was already fading a second later, and Zac knew this was his chance.

Cosmic Energy surged in his body, and a gate appeared in the sky. It was completely different from the crude scar in space that appeared with the weaker versions of [Arcadia's Judgment]. It didn't even close after the huge wooden hand emerged. Instead, it grew over ten times in size as it teleported over to hover right above the Sinner Mound.

A dense set of patterns formed at the portal's edge, and the whole mound groaned as it was drowned in golden-green light. The scene was reminiscent of his old skill that went into the fusion of [Arcadia's Judgment], [Nature's Punishment]. However, this time, no mountain or tree came crashing down. Instead, it almost looked like the essence of Arcadia shone down at the world from within the spatial gate.

Zac knew just what kind of terrifying pressure that light emitted. He'd turned a hill even larger than the Sinner Mound into a crater with the light alone after he'd finally evolved [Arcadia's Judgment] to Peak Mastery. But the Sinner Mound actually resisted the tremendous pressure, even if the top layers of soil and stone were crushed and pushed away.

"That's a Sinner Mound, alright," Ogras muttered, and Zac's eyes widened in shock.

A gargantuan stake piercing through a huge pile of corpses.

That was what hid beneath the soil and oil-like emanations from the mound. The bodies radiated an intensely strong aura of sin, and pitch-black liquid continuously poured out of their mouths and hollow eye sockets. With tens of thousands of bodies, they produced a swimming pool's worth of gunk every second, which should be impossible considering how dried and withered they looked.

As for the enormous spike, it was clearly not part of the mound itself. It was created with a deep blue metal and contained a powerful aura of lightning. It was covered in complex runes that made Zac's soul shudder.

A stake imbued with the wrath of the heavens, piercing straight at the heart of sin.

The runes seemed to be powered by the lightning bolts to dig deeper into the mound. But the sinister sludge covered the spike, filling the runes with corruption. The Sinner Mound was pushing back, probably trying to remove the spike altogether.

"An array flag, perhaps?" Ogras ventured.

"Seems that way," Catheya agreed.

Zac hesitated for a moment, but he knew he had to make a decision. The skill had already been activated, and he couldn't delay for too long before he needed to follow through. After all, the glowing gate to Arcadia wasn't the true face of [Arcadia's Judgment]. It was still the axe strike.

The wooden hand was even larger than before, and the runes covering its hands were no longer indistinct. They glowed with mesmerizing light, holding the truths of Life and Conflict. At Peak Mastery, the skill had truly become an avatar of his Daos. The twenty-meter axe was perfection, seemingly a treasure born from nature and the Heavens themselves.

It exuded tremendous power, including a punishing aura that seemed to resonate with the spike. The skill had been activated to judgment was to be meted out. The Axe descended, but it didn't aim for the pile of leaking corpses. Instead, it crashed down toward the head of the spike.

Thousands of runes fell through the gate of Arcadia, and they all poured into the stone axe as it fell. The emerald runes covering the handle and head lit up with unquestionable might, suddenly holding a wrathful aura like it contained the will of the ancient heavens.

It crashed down with world-ending force, hitting the spike with enough impact to cleave mountains. For a fraction of a second, it was as though the world had frozen before time resumed. A huge scar cut the Sinner Mound in two, hundreds of meters across and just as deep. It formed a canyon over twenty meters across, and the desiccated corpses were simply erased from existence.

But the spike held against Zac's most powerful attack, as did a glowing red orb that had previously been hidden in the heart of the mound. Looking at the nefarious light made Zac's heart thump, and he felt a wave of killing intent almost consume him. But the feeling disappeared as quickly as it came, the madness quelled by the Void in his heart.

The Sinner Core held, but not for long. Even if [Arcadia's Judgment] had failed to cleave it in two, it had acted as a hammer. The thunder spike had been forced more than halfway into the sphere, and Zac could see how incredibly pure arcs of lightning had been injected into the core.

A piercing wail rippled through Sinner's Lament as the Sinner Core shattered into hundreds of splinters, and Zac felt his vision double as he almost keeled over. Ogras groaned while a shroud of shadows sealed him inside, while a talisman floating behind Catheya snapped.

"Bounty Claimed. Share: 120 Mana," Null's said, but Zac had no time to celebrate his idea being correct.

The split-apart mound was twisting and frothing, and Zac found himself thrown hundreds of meters away by an enormous eruption of resentment that instantly crushed Catheya's ice wall.

"A surge! We're trapped!" Catheya shouted as she crawled to her feet, completely covered in grime after landing in a knee-deep pond of blood.

Zac glanced up at the sky and sighed. The clouds were exhausted after unleashing that bolt of lightning. No help was forthcoming from above. Besides, this surge was different from the ones before. There were still no wraiths at all. Instead, the resentment poured into the mound that had already fused back together.

A lot of corpses had been destroyed, but even more crawled up from the depths, their resentment joining to form something terrifying. Zac knew they couldn't let the scene continue. Thankfully, his skill was still not over, and he'd held the final component in reserve as long as possible just for something like this.

The ground shook and heaved until a primal fury from the depths of the earth erupted. The ground split apart, and thousands of rune-covered spikes emerged. The reformed mound immediately collapsed again when faced with the wrath of the land it had soiled. A storm of destruction swept through the rocky formation, ripping apart corpses by the thousands.

Yet it wasn't enough. Zac looked on with helplessness as a stream of new corpses crawled out from the depths. Zac rushed forward, but another wail from the mound conjured a storm of resentment so powerful he couldn't get closer. He tried to cut it open with a series of fractal leaves, but they were just swallowed and consumed.

A pang of danger forced him to flash out of the way, allowing him to narrowly avoid a putrid blade made by the corpses' black liquid. Zac hesitated whether he should force his way inside, but the storm suddenly abated.

"Of course," Ogras, who had already caught up, groaned.

The mound was gone, replaced by a macabre construct of innumerable desiccated corpses. It had no set shape, but it looked more like an enormous isopod with dozens of legs than a humanoid. The corpses seemingly turned into formable clay upon becoming part of the creature, some being twisted beyond what should be possible to make up a piece of a leg or a claw.

The corpses kept spewing out the black tainted liquid as well. Some of it formed the blades of resentment it kept shooting at them, where even the blades that missed formed putrid pools that made Zac's hair stand on end. But most liquid stayed on the construct and hardened into a protective shell.

A sudden pang of danger made Zac flash away just as Ogras shouted, "Below!"

The ground had come alive, and an oily fanged maw dripping with resentment had formed right where Zac stood. The sudden attack was like a starting call, and madness gripped the area. Faces, hands, spikes, and pitfalls appeared all around them. Every area within ten meters of where a resentment blade landed had been possessed.

Powerful blades were raining from above, and insidious dangers were striking from below. The area had become a true zone of death. The barrage was endless. Even worse, it prevented Zac from focusing on the huge creature that was the source of it all. Zac felt a vague sense of danger from the thing, and he knew he couldn't let it accumulate forever.

A wave of frigid cold suddenly passed him, instantly freezing the ground where he stood. The ten-fingered claw that had just tried to grip him was trapped in place, leaving Zac completely unencumbered for a moment. He glanced back and saw that a black crown of ice appeared on Catheya's head as she rose into the air.

Five teardrops with ancient engravings of ice appeared behind her head, and a frigid cold swept out in every direction. In no time, an area of hundreds of meters had been turned into a world of ice. The roiling waves of the lands were frozen solid, the spikes and pitfalls cracking into chunks of dirty ice.

"Deal with the big guy. I'll try to stop it from gathering more bodies!" Ogras shouted as six wings grew from his back.

The ghastly flag had been fully unfurled, forming a band of anguished faces three meters long. Just looking at the tapestry of suffering made Zac's soul shudder. A storm of spears came crashing down from the flying demon, destroying everything locked within the ice. In an instant, a huge crater over 30 meters deep had been formed, exposing a terrifying truth.

The whole bedrock was suddenly filled with corpses, almost an endless number crawling toward the surface. A stream of Ogras's captured wraiths was already pouring into the hole, dragging bodies out and ripping them apart by the hundreds.

Catheya's world of ice had already spread into the hole, locking the seeping resentment in place and protecting the wraiths from being assimilated by Sinner's Lament. The corpses lost some of their unnatural flexibility from the cold, while Ogras's wraiths remained unaffected.

Zac wasted no time as he flashed through the air, using the floating steps of [Earthstrider] to appear right beneath the creature. A storm of fractal leaves erupted from his body, each one two meters long and imbued with both War Axe and Kalpataru.

The corpse construct emitted an unstable aura approaching Middle D-grade, but the shell of corruption it had created couldn't defend against the unstoppable force trapped inside the fractal leaves. Huge chunks of black oil and dry flesh were instantly carved out of the creature, falling like rain all around him.

A huge twisted face formed on the creature's stomach, and dozens of sinner blades shot at Zac. Unfortunately for the enormous creature, Zac was far too agile in his human form. Another patch of grass appeared beneath his foot as he took another step in the air. The next moment, he appeared over a hundred meters away, right behind the creature.

The monster was already forming another layer of corruption around its wounds, but Zac didn't care. The outburst from [Nature's Edge] had destroyed hundreds of corpses, shrinking the construct by almost 10%. And he wasn't finished there. Four powerful vines stabbed into the ground, giving Zac some upward momentum to keep him in the air a bit longer. Simultaneously, a huge hundred-meter leaf appeared in front of [Verun's Bite].

The blade was almost as tall as the creature and contained the truths of the Abyss and Arcadia. The blade fell, and the world was delineated. A spatial divide cut the huge creature in two, creating a ten-meter-wide corridor of nothingness. The blade lingered for a few seconds, disintegrating any corpses that tried to move toward the other side of the unbridgeable chasm of [Rapturous Divide].

But the skill couldn't last forever. Zac looked up at the creature as he landed on a platform of ice formed by Catheya, but he had to immediately flash away to avoid dozens of sinner blades. The two halves were already fusing together into a whole, though they had shrunk once more. Zac grunted with annoyance as he looked up.

If the construct refused to die, he'd just have to keep swinging until there was nothing left to reform.

Ten minutes later, Zac stood panting atop a frozen pile of broken flesh, almost half of his Cosmic Energy consumed. Ultimately, he hadn't found any better method than methodically cutting down the creature until no corpses were left. There were no weaknesses to the construct, and none of the three had managed to find anything like a core of its energy.

The punishing thunder ultimately hadn't come to their rescue, though the corpses were thankfully possible to permanently destroy, unlike the resentment wraiths.

"Nothing," Ogras swore as he appeared next to Zac. "I was almost sure the shards of the Sinner Core fueled it."

"Maybe it was, but the pieces dissolved before we could find them," Catheya guessed. "After all, we dealt with this thing the crudest way possible."

"Now that we know what to expect, we might be able to snatch the pieces before they disappear. That might prevent the construct from forming altogether," Zac said.

"How did you know to hit the spike before?" Catheya asked curiously.

"So far, we haven't managed to destroy any wraiths, except when using items empowered by thunder," Zac shrugged. "I was worried the Sinner Core would share the same properties and reform even if I cut it. It seemed more prudent to target the spike that was full of the aura of lightning."

"So what now?" Ogras asked as he turned to Catheya. "Can we just use that array of yours?"

The array of Sinner Crystals soon appeared, but she shook her head soon after.

"Not from here, at least," Catheya said. "We're most likely too far away. The energy in the crystals can't reach too far. The compass should be able to reach further during a surge, but I'm not sure the ambient energy is enough. We may need a powerful sacrifice of resentment to work."

"A sacrifice?" Zac said. "So, more crystals, or what?"

"Exactly. The more crystals we sacrifice, the greater the range."

"So we need to gather crystals to find mounds, but the more crystals we gather, the more waves of wraiths we'll have to endure."

"Just so," Catheya nodded.

"Well, seems straightforward enough. The harder we work, the more mounds we'll find," Ogras shrugged. "I guess we can rest when this is all over."