

## Defiance of the Fall

### Chapter 1151: Breaking Out

Zac had already been grappling with the idea of contacting Leandra because of the sudden appearance of powerful Technocrats. It was part of why he returned to Earth with his Draugr side. He hadn't pulled the trigger yet, partly because of the emotional baggage that came with it and partly because he knew too little. What faction did the Technocrats belong to, and what were their goals in Zecia? Were they targeting him and Kenzie, or were they joining the struggle for Ultom?

With the new questions stemming from his transformation, Zac figured he didn't have much choice. It could be years before Iz returned, and he didn't dare wait that long for answers. Then again, Zac might have to, considering there were no guarantees she'd even bother answering his call.

Ultimately, making contact would have to wait until he dealt with the tower and his breakthrough. The lightning was still receding, so Zac closed the Status Screen and shifted his attention to his Soul Aperture.

The improvements to his soul didn't pale in comparison to the constitution or core. Zac felt it might have surpassed the changes to his Cosmic Core. The swirling nebulae of opposing elements had shrunk to two-thirds their original size, while the number of glimmering specks resembling attuned stars had increased by a third.

The Evolutionary and Inexorable Cores shone with splendor like a layer of dust had been wiped off their surface. They had undergone a rebirth with far more changes to their internal structure. Zac wasn't surprised, considering they were significantly more flawed than his Cosmic Core. Their creation hadn't benefitted from nearly as much planning or as expensive materials.

Part of it was due to necessity, where the stringent requirements for his Cosmic Core were far greater than forming a Three Fates Soul. It was also a matter of priorities. Taking the time to form a perfect Soul Core wasn't as critical since they weren't physical objects. They were Mental Energy, Soul, and Dao, and thus more malleable.

The imperfections would gradually resolve themselves as he evolved his Daos and practiced the fourth layer of the **[Nine Reincarnations Manual]**. It was similar to how a Cultivator could gradually improve their Cosmic Cores, so this was an aspect where Mortals weren't quite as disadvantaged. The Tribulation Throne had cut that work in half, saving him time down the road. Effort spent on refinement could instead be used on advancement.

More importantly, it removed many impurities and properly integrated the refined Oblivion- and Moss Energies. The rebirth hadn't wiped away all signs of heterogeneity but more than Zac dared hope for. It would have taken at least a decade to see similar results if he'd relied on nothing but practicing his Soul Strengthening Manual.

The three Dao Apparitions were one of the few aspects of his cultivation that hadn't seen any real changes. They felt more spirited than before, but that was about it. Zac could tell that, despite the comprehensive overhaul to his body, he hadn't improved his connection to his Daos or gained any affinities. If anything, he felt even more detached from the Heavens now that the Void had invaded his cells.

Perhaps that meant his affinity with the various Voids had improved, but that didn't help much when he had no method of cultivating it. That notion made him think of something else, and his gaze shifted to his Soul Aperture's edge. Zac sighed and retracted his senses soon after. As expected, the Void Mountain was gone.

Zac had guessed this would happen when the mountain appeared during his vision. Confirming it was still a disappointment. It wasn't just his method of studying the Voids of Life and Death that had been cut off. It also meant losing his ability to temporarily imbue his Techniques with the Void.

On some level, Zac felt it might be for the best, even if it left him with one fewer ace in the short run. The mountain had quickly become a bit of a crutch, like how he overly relied on the Remnants during the E-grade. It was all too easy to get used to outside assistance, often at the expense of your progress.

And it wasn't like the mountain was completely gone. Part of it was there, swirling about in his cells, hiding in the shadows of his Soul Cores. Zac believed it was an important key to replacing the Void Mountain with his own abilities. If he could learn to harness the Void that lived in his Life- or Death-attuned cells, he should be able to generate the Voids of Life and Death with his own body.

Sure, he hadn't had much luck regarding his Cosmic Core in that department. Zac felt he should be able to extract the Voids of Life and Death from it, considering how it was constructed, but that wasn't the case. Even if the Death-attuned third of his Cosmic Core was in a Void State when observed from his human form, it still provided normal Miasma rather than Void Energy.

Perhaps that would change when his bloodline finally caught up. The thought helped lessen the worries that came with involuntarily triggering his breakthrough, and it was just in time. Twelve minutes had passed since Zac regained his body, and the sea of lightning had finally reached the threshold of being considered safe.

Zac felt his connection to the broken throne sever as the protective plate to the control room opened. Or rather, it rose halfway before getting stuck. A sooty form squeezed out beneath before rushing at Zac while waving a large metal spike.

"Uh," Zac said upon seeing Emily's bedraggled form.

His disciple looked like she was the one who had just undergone the tribulation, with her clothes, hair, and skin being scorched. The half of her hair that hadn't been singed off stood straight out and refused to lay down even while she waved the large spear to disperse the lingering lightning. At least her aura was stable, and the fires burning in her eyes indicated her soul was intact.

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"Lunatic! What did I tell you?! What kind of fool would I be if I let you take the lead? It wasn't enough beating those—" Emily snarled, but she lost her train of thought upon getting a better look at Zac. "Hey, what happened to you? Did you shrink? And why does it feel like I'll get eaten if I come any closer?"

"Sorry, I guess you were right. A few things happened," Zac laughed, knowing her outburst came from a place of worry.

"Don't they always with you?" Emily muttered as she cocked her head. "So weird."

"How do I look?" Zac asked as he took an investigative step forward.

Movement felt smooth and natural, and energy cycled through his pathway with minimal spillage.

"I don't know," Emily hesitated. "A bit better, I think? You feel like a volcano about to erupt. And it's like you've fused with your surroundings. No, wait, like you've been separated from your surroundings. Huh, so weird."

"You could say it's a reward from passing the whole trial."

"It's good that you passed, but why did you have to blow it up?" Emily glared. "We might have been able to excavate something from it."

Excavate? Zac's eyes widened, and he turned around to look at the inner spikes. Gone? His Luck had increased by 30%, but Zac couldn't even sense a hint of the treasure he discovered upon first entering. The Faith Energy was also fully depleted, leaving only wild lightning in the spike.

Was the hidden treasure a Faith Treasure, perhaps something blessed by Laondio himself? That would explain how a wisp of his will could form and how a Trial ground in a C-grade Fortress could harness the Four Laws and the One Destiny.

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"Hello? Did your head get fried, too?"

"Ah? Well, things happened. I guess the throne wasn't designed to deal with people split into two bodies," Zac slowly said, putting the matter aside.

Perhaps it was for the best that the treasure was gone. Zac wasn't sure if he would be able to resist consuming it now that his movements weren't restrained. Just the thought made Zac's stomach clench with desire.

"So you cheated?" Emily laughed, unaware of Zac's inner struggle. "I guess Meso Helo is still the top dog."

"If you say so," Zac said with a roll of his eyes. "Though I'm not sure I'd agree that using my body to its full potential should count as cheating."

"I guess," Emily said. "Would be stupid to limit yourself with self-imposed rules when benefits are on the line."

"So what happened to you? Are you okay?" Zac asked as he stepped closer. Suddenly, a stabbing pain of hunger made him grunt and grasp his shrunken stomach.

"S-stop!" Emily exclaimed as she took a fearful step back. "Ah? What just happened? It suddenly felt like a primordial beast was staring me down."

"I'm sorry," Zac sighed and retreated. "It's my bloodline. The Tribulation Throne triggered its evolution, and I can't stop it. I have 40 minutes at best before I need to break through."

"Oh?" Emily blankly said. "Isn't that a good thing? Why not just break through here? This room is double-reinforced."

Zac staunchly shook his head. "Remember the Memorysteel Mountain? Imagine that but two grades higher. I'm not breaking through before I get you out of here. Let's check the Teleporter again."

Zac didn't hold much hope, but the situation was even worse than he'd feared. The safety door had given out, and the array was devastated. He'd figured they could rush back here after stopping the launch protocol if all else failed, but that option was now out the window. There was no way to tell what state the waiting room was left in as the security shutter had failed.

Soon, they turned to the door they came from, and a look confirmed they shared the same concerns. His breakthrough hadn't exactly been discreet, and the vibrations had probably reached the upper floors. There was no telling what awaited them on the other side since fifteen minutes had passed since he began his breakthrough. It could be nothing, but there could also be Technocrats or guardian sentinels ready to turn them into Swiss cheese the second the doors opened.

Zac cracked his neck, readying himself for a tough battle. He might get to test out his new body sooner rather than later.

"You know, I have just the thing," Emily said with a ferocious grin. "You don't care if the last spikes would blow up, right?"

"Uh, no?" Zac said, looking over dubiously. "But we'd be the first to get hit if we detonate them."

"Not necessarily," Emily said, her smile widening as a compact **[Godslayer Cannon]** thumped onto the ground.

It wasn't as big as the ones they used on the battlefield, but it was made from better materials and covered in denser engravings. Zac didn't understand what Emily was planning, but a mix of pride and horror filled his heart as Emily rapidly took out one item after another. First, she filled the cannon with something resembling a bundle of metallic javelins that stuck out a meter from the barrel's edge.

Next, she took out a large box and attached three thick tubes to sockets normal **[Godslayer Cannons]** lacked. It wasn't hard to figure out the rest.

"A lightning cannon? Where did you get this?"

"The Munitions Guild lets me take some experiments to get them field tested," Emily explained as she smoothly assembled the pieces. "The tinkerers got very excited after someone showed them a modified taser from the old world. They wanted to make a big version that could blast a whole army."

"Of course they did."

"They couldn't come up with a good solution for the electricity, though. A normal **[Godslayer Cannon]** is way more practical at lower price ranges, and they simply couldn't generate a strong enough current to turn it into a high-grade weapon. So one of them figured she'd borrow nature's power instead, turning the **[Godslayer Coil]** into a conditional weapon until they found a better solution."

Zac's gaze shifted to the dozen-odd lightning rods arranged around the broken throne, inwardly shaking his head.

"Even if it works, the cannon won't hold up long. That lightning even melted the throne."

"So what? Isn't that always the deal with the stuff those guys make?" Emily laughed before her face grew grim. "Besides, do we have much choice? If we can take out a cannon, can't they do the same? I'm afraid we'll come out on the losing end without relying on the Tribulation Throne."

Zac grunted in agreement. If Technocrats waited on the other side, there was a high risk they'd find themselves in a situation similar to the deathsworn

ambush. Outsiders simply had better equipment. Emily's plan was dangerous, but it could sweep aside all opposition. If he went out axe swinging, he might have to use Oblivion Energy to break through their defenses. Provided he didn't get himself killed first.

Emily rapidly set everything up while Zac inspected the remaining spikes. Most of the stockpiled energy had been unleashed by his breakthrough, but a decent amount was left in the spikes themselves. And the fact that the Faith Energy was gone actually worked in their favor. They wanted the lightning as wild and ferocious as possible.

"So why are you looking like that?" Zac asked while he decided on which spikes to hit and where.

"I'm not sure if I should be angry or thankful," Emily said as she shot Zac a reproachful look as he floated by the ceiling. "The isolation failed when the last two spikes activated, flooding the control room with lightning. I thought I was toast, but there was an emergency protocol. A hidden compartment spat out a mini-throne and a pill just before the consoles broke down."

"An unknown pill?" Zac frowned. "You ate it?"

"Of course I ate it! I was getting barbequed, you know," Emily glared before a smile tugged at her lips. "Anyway, it was good stuff, filled with the same Dao as the throne. And since my body was still malleable from my own run, the experience resumed where my trial left off. With better lightning, at that. My gains are actually bigger than before, including improvements to my core."

"There's such a good thing?" Zac exclaimed.

"Your lucky halo's getting stronger," Emily laughed. "Alright, I'm finished."

"Get ready," Zac said as he moved to the doorway. "Shoot, even if there's nothing on the other side, then follow on my heels."

"Got it!"

Emily and her cannon disappeared the next moment, and the lingering lightning helped mask the energy fluctuations. Zac already had **[Verun's Bite]** in hand, and streaks of Dao and Energy danced around its edge. A small frown appeared on his face as he looked at **[Evolutionary Edge]**. The

skill activated fine, but his bloodline was cannibalizing his energy, forcing Zac to expend twice as much.

Zac pushed away all errant thoughts as **[Ossuary Bulwark]** closed around him while a defensive talisman formed a glimmering barrier around his body. Flashing the **[Court Cycle Token]** elicited a groan as the doors slid open. Zac unleashed a torrent of attacks at the inner spikes the moment the door had opened at least enough to activate **[Apex Jungle]** if needed.

The already damaged spikes had barely been holding on, and it looked like the roof collapsed when six spikes shattered at once. An almost solid waterfall of lightning was dragged into the lightning rods and transformed in the converter before being deposited in the cannon. At least, that was the idea. The box exploded into a blob of molten iron held in suspension by the immense current coursing through it.

Zac's hair stood on end, partly from fear and partly from the immense amounts of Lightning-attuned energy that once more filled the chamber. Suddenly, a lance of orange energy burst through the gates, but Zac barely had time to register the attack before the Technocrat weapon was swallowed by a pillar of blue that engraved itself on Zac's retinas.

Even his Soul Sense became blurry when faced with Emily's attack, yet he still rushed forth, dodging red-hot shrapnel from the **[Godslayer Coil]**. His senses were going haywire, indicating danger in every direction. However, nothing came close to the mayhem building within the Tribulation Throne.

The six spikes he'd shattered were those already sporting significant damage, which gave them a small window before all hell broke loose. However, that window was less than one second, and the cannon was gone the moment it fired. As expected, channeling the synthetic Tribulation Lightning was far beyond the capabilities of the Tinkerer Death Ray.

A toasty Emily was hot on his heels as they lunged out the gate just before the protective barrier slammed down. Zac had feared they'd be greeted by a sea of lightning of their own making, but the lightning beam had slammed into the opposite wall before splitting. Some lingering energy was left behind, along with molten scraps and two scorched corpses.

Three more had survived the onslaught, though Zac wondered if they wished they hadn't. Their bodies were covered in third-degree burns, while their eyes were dilated and unfocused. Zac could even see the lightning ravaging their



insides. A furious blitz ended their struggle. Zac planned on looking through their items but was horrified to find his cells siphoning the Technocrats's energy.

It felt too close to cannibalism for comfort, and Zac felt himself losing ground to the hunger the more he consumed. Better move on.

*'Follow me!'*

Zac rushed down the hallway, using his Dao and defensive talisman to force a path through the lingering lightning. He led Emily down the path they came from before taking a series of turns. It wasn't the fastest way to the next floor, but the route took them further away from the wing with the mission operations. Neither Emily nor Zac bothered scanning the side chambers during their mad dash. The clock was ticking, and time was running out.

One way or another, the chapter on the Sixth Centurion Lighthouse was about to close.

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## Chapter 1152: Falling Out

The corridors turned into a blur as Zac rushed forth, guided by the memorized floor plans. Emily buffed herself with her speed-elevating buff. She tried the same with Zac, but his bloodline rapidly consumed the foreign energy. It lasted less than a minute before collapsing, so they gave up on the idea. She would only hasten his breakthrough if she kept feeding him like that. Furthermore, whenever his cells feasted on high-grade energy, Zac felt the hunger grow more intense. The source of this content is No(v)elFire.net

The only solution he found was relying on his Draugr half. He was still sitting atop the monolith, busying himself by stuffing his mouth with large amounts of low-grade Death-attuned food. It somewhat alleviated his cravings without

accelerating his bloodline awakening by a noticeable degree. Unfortunately, this was one time his fortune was working against him.

His rings had plenty of provisions, but it was almost exclusively high-grade food that could be considered Pseudo D-grade tonics. It was mostly made from Beast King meat and prepared by real Cultivator Chefs. What little non-spiritual food he had was prepared in case he stumbled onto some starving low-grade cultivator and didn't have time to dilute the energy in his meals.

The Technocrats either lacked manpower or had other priorities, and they didn't encounter any more men on the floor. They soon reached the stairs leading to the next level, where a sudden scream of danger forced Zac to lunge back around the corner. An orange laser was only a touch too slow, incinerating the air where he had just stood. Zac had already scanned the corner with his Soul Sense, finding nothing amiss.

The Technocrats once more flaunted their varied methods as a chest-high turret appeared from a camouflage array. Zac tried to launch fractal edges around the bend, making use of the D-grade **[Evolutionary Edge]**'s greater maneuverability. Most were destroyed by the gun, while the few that got close failed to break through an energy shield.

Zac grunted in annoyance. They couldn't waste time like this. If nothing else, the sentry was likely informing its owners that it was under attack. Thankfully, the tower had his back. The turret used technology to mask its origin and elude the tower's senses.

That method quickly failed, thanks to Zac's bombardment destabilizing its barriers and a stretch of arrays lit up in the hallway. Zac urgently backed away before he was lumped in with the turret, swearing when he saw it was no use. The corridor was coming alive, so Zac changed course, pushing into the mounting gravity by the stairs.

The turret tried to shoot him, but its barrel exploded under the tower's attention. It was the straw that broke the camel's back. The barriers failed, and the contraption buckled, allowing Zac to destroy it with a series of quick swings. He pushed through the sea of orange flames and threw the scraps into a disposable Cosmos sack.

Zac crushed the Spatial Tool to discard the turret in the Void, exhaling with relief when the hallway calmed down. Emily had already caught up, scattering dust to hide their traces before throwing out array disks that blended with the

ground. Magical mines. The **[Godslayer Coil]** was clearly only the tip of a very dangerous iceberg. Zac nodded at his calamitous disciple, and they made their way to the next floor.

It quickly became apparent the turret was only the first of many. The Technocrats had placed them at major intersections and chokepoints, causing constant delays and headaches. And while Zac's keen danger sense let him avoid their ambushes, he still had to worry about an increasingly irate fortress.

After dealing with three turrets, it became abundantly clear that his efforts didn't expose the Technocrat weapons to the tower's scanners. They were intentionally designed to draw attention when their ambushes failed to injure their target. Turrets were cheap while lives were precious, so going for mutual destruction was a sound tactic.

Even then, Zac found the traps more annoying than deadly. His greatly boosted Luck had sharpened his instincts further, allowing him to make accurate judgments and move with pinpoint precision. Sometimes, he disposed of the machines like the first he encountered. Other times, he simply grabbed Emily and ran away while the sentinels wrapped things up.

The real problem was the beckoning call of treasure, which had only grown more potent after gaining his Limited Title. Even the string of illusory **[Lucky Beads]** around his neck seemed to have been energized by the Tribulation Throne, though Zac didn't have time to study their transformation. Right now, they were becoming a problem, to the point that Zac would have unequipped them if not for their assistance in pinpointing danger.

There were supreme treasures on almost every floor at the top, with a few sporting more than one. Just being in the same hallway made Zac gradually lose reason. Even some normal rooms they passed made Zac shudder with hunger, proving they held something energy-dense. However, it wasn't as good as whatever was hidden further down the hall.

They were so close, and he was still incomplete. The monolith and the things it brought forth in the Ensolus Ruins were already resisting his ascent. Now, this decrepit old tower wanted to do the same. Rusty doors and broken circuitry tried to cut off his path to perfection? Laughable. Evolution was Heavenly Mandate, and his Apotheosis was inevitable.

Hunger shaped reality and sealed secrets were exposed to the Void. Vague desire morphed into a vision of a box hidden in a spatial fold, protected by

layers of arrays. He was the Void, coming and going where he pleased. Nothing under the Heavens could prevent him from taking what was his. Space held no meaning, and he reached for the first piece of perfection.

A stinging pain across his cheek launched Zac off his feet and made him crash into the wall with the force of a cannonball. Zac took a shuddering breath, his eyes wide with alarm over losing control so quickly and completely. It was a humbling reminder his inroads to Heart Cultivation could only help him so far. Like any other trick, it was helpless when faced with overwhelming power.

Emily's well-timed slap had brought him back to reality, but it was already too late. He'd blindly rushed to the chamber holding a supreme treasure and reached into the Void. Now, the Void refused to let go. Zac could no longer see the interiors through the mysterious vision that seemed a combination of the Void and his Luck, but he could hear and feel the commotion inside the sealed room.

The real problem wasn't the triggered safeguards. It was the vortex he'd formed in his delirious state. It was about to swallow the tightly defended box, and Zac knew that would push him closer to the point of no return. Perhaps it'd make him cross it entirely, depending on what treasure it held. He couldn't let that happen. They still had some ways to go.

Zac growled with defiance as he imposed a steely will of rejection on his bloodline. *He* was the Void, and none but him would decide what would be taken. This box, it was not for him. It was not part of his path, and thus, could only be rejected. The hunger of the Void fought back, and Zac felt his vision blur as he fought a losing battle.

Out of better ideas, Zac could only take a gamble on something he'd vaguely gleaned during his rebirth. He stopped his struggle, and the box was dragged inside. Simultaneously, a vortex appeared before his hand, aimed at a shocked Emily.

"Out!" Zac growled.

The vortex shuddered and struggled, but Zac pushed with every fiber in his being. The box emerged, propelled by the force of its pull. A profound circle was engraved on its lid, which made Zac think of the wheel of reincarnation. Each side was made from a different material, forming a mysterious cycle that

showcased many of the truths Zac had drawn from the **[Book of Duality]**. It was mesmerizing, and seeing it with his real eyes made the madness return.

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"Stow it," Zac croaked, his eyes veritably burning.

He could barely stop himself from lunging at Emily. A part of his mind screamed at him to strike her down for taking what was rightfully his, though those thoughts were quashed and banished the moment they appeared. His mind rejected the notion so vehemently that their mere appearance shook his mind awake. Emily was pale from the attention and quickly put the box away.

Only then did the madness recede, allowing Zac to take back control over his mind.

"You—"

"I'm sorry. You did the right thing," Zac exhaled. "If I lose control, throw some Natural Treasures at me and run far away. I'll do my best to not impact you."

"Don't talk like that. We're almost there. Let's keep going."

Zac nodded, and they set out again. They were forced to take an even more roundabout path to avoid the same issue from cropping up again. The change forced them to waste even more time on their final ascent, increasing the risk of running into more cultivators. As expected, their luck finally caught up to them when there were only four floors left from their destination.

Shouts reverberated down the hall, stopping Zac and Emily in their tracks. They couldn't back down. They'd left a trail of broken turrets like breadcrumbs, and the corridor ahead was the only path to the wing where the control center was located. Instead, they hunkered down and prepared for a siege.

However, no Technocrats came barreling down the corridor. Instead, the shouts grew more urgent, while powerful energy eruptions caused vibrations on the floor. A battle?

*'It's the aura of the imperials!'* Emily commented through a mental link.

Zac nodded with a heavy heart. So the imperials had really come all this way, making their mission even more difficult. However, it looked like their cooperation had broken down completely. Had they turned against each other now that the prize was within reach?

*'Around ten of them? What should we do?'*

Zac listened for a few more seconds before answering. *'It's five versus four, with the four being imperials. Let's wait for now. They're still feeling each other out.'*

*'So they came to blows in the end. That's great,'* Emily grinned.

*'Makes our life easier,'* Zac agreed.

The battle continued, and the fluctuations grew increasingly intense. It soon passed the threshold of life and death. The imperials were one man short, yet they suppressed the opponent with an all-out offense. Zac had expected as much. The Technocrat's auras were by no means weaker, but their methods were restrained inside the tower.

Zac's eyes shot open as the arrays around them activated, triggered by a whirring sound and an outburst of energy unmistakably teeming with the Dao of Technology. Emily looked around with fright, only relaxing upon confirming the tower's ire was concentrated on the fighters.

*'Get ready!'* Zac instructed. *'I'll take point. Focus on stopping anyone from escaping.'*

Zac tensed, waiting for the right moment to strike. Several earth-shattering explosions stopped the whirring. The walls dimmed, and the pressure relented. It was time. Zac shot forth, moving through the corridors like a streak of death. Emily kept pace, her form fading inside a storm of tomahawks that filled the hallways.

It only took a second to reach their destination, where they found four Middle Hegemons fighting tooth and nail. Five bodies lay unmoving on the ground, two of which were killed by the tower's sentinels. Piles of molten scraps surrounded them, the remains of the machines that triggered the defenses.

Zac had hoped the sentinels would finish the job, but the outsiders wouldn't have reached this far if they lacked any methods to deal with the tower. The

reinforced doors that required the **[Court Cycle Token]** would have stopped them in their tracks. Therefore, Zac made his move the moment they used up their aces.

A floating rune saying "authority" shrouded the remaining deathsworn in golden radiance. Meanwhile, a clearly Technocrat drone generated a rippling bubble around itself, muting any signals from the weapons in its owner's hands.

The Technocrats were fighting to kill the deathsworn while the imperials targeted both Technocrats and their drone. Their battle froze upon spotting a third party entering the fray, but Zac gave them no time to figure out what was happening.

A brutal arc tore into the most wounded deathsworn, powered by all the pent-up stress Zac had accumulated since they ambushed him. The soldier seemed incredibly shocked but blocked the strike with her shield. The force was far too overbearing to absorb. Bones snapped, and the deathsworn was forced to her knees, where an armored foot was already waiting. It crashed into her face, sending her right through the floating rune before smashing into the wall.

Zac's figure disappeared like the attacker had been a hologram, only to reappear next to the Technocrats. Zac felt a cold sensation as he passed through the bubble, knowing he'd just phased through another physical barrier. His breakthrough had left him with one foot in the Void, making his body exhibit some of its properties.

The barriers had been rendered moot, and **[Skystriker]** showcased its true strength in the cramped, chaotic battle. The kick that had almost caved in the deathsworn soldier's face still packed plenty of momentum, and a pained wail followed a gruesome crunch.

The kick shattered one of the Technocrat's knees, and the sudden, blinding pain made him forget to stay aloft using energy. The infiltrator fell over, and **[Verun's Bite]** was there to catch him. It almost looked like the Technocrat was presenting his throat to the gleaming edge of Zac's blade. In reality, it was the product of the Evolutionary Stance and a mountain of experience.

The furious blitz hadn't even taken a second, yet it left one combatant unconscious and another dead. Only two remained, and they reached a

common split-second decision—escape. Each turned into a streak before Zac had finished his swing, escaping in opposite directions.

Zac could feel Emily's intent in the storm and made a beeline for the imperial, taking out the Technocrat drone on the way. Streaks of axelight hounded the man, repeatedly forcing him to stop or dodge. With Zac's elevated body and superior attribute pool, it took no time for him to catch up.

Madness shone in the soldier's eyes as he stopped and swung his sword in a final act of defiance. The target wasn't Zac. It was a flickering rune on the wall. Zac's brows furrowed, but he made no attempt to escape. His axe dug into the soldier's skull just as the sword flooded the unstable rune with foreign Dao and energy.

Zac was already moving away, using his Movement Skill to focus on speed. However, the rune shattered, unleashing a wave that carried the weight of a mountain. Its gravity field was so dense that **[Skystriker]** failed to carve a path. Zac's mind screamed of danger as he was forced to his knee.

The Void and his aligned body had pushed his body beyond its previous boundaries, but it was not yet enough to withstand the crushing pressure within the tower arrays. He rolled the dice, calling forth Void Energy to reactivate the movement skill. Suddenly, the pressure was gone, and Zac flitted through the corridors like a ghost separated from the cosmos.

He was back by the unconscious soldier in no time, his body hunched over by fatal hunger. He swung his axe to finish the job before stepping away from the corpses. His body reached even further to siphon energy from its surroundings. Soon after, Emily returned with a bloodied tomahawk in hand.

"It's dealt with?" Zac asked with a heaving breath.

"It's dealt with," Emily confirmed as she ran her hand through her scorched hair. "He threw out his whole spatial ring when he was about to die. Too bad they'd already used that—holy crap!"

Zac was already on the move, fleeing down the corridor they came from. Emily appeared by his side, and the two looked on in surprise as a seal rose from the soldier's body. The imperial soldier was actually a Reignender of the Starfall Court, but neither Zac nor Emily was happy to have another seal appear before them.



"What should we do about this thing?" Emily urged, nervously looking around. "It's going to attract people, and it's blocking the path forward."

"What can we do? We can't take it. It'll dissipate on its own," Zac whispered, as much to convince himself as to answer Emily. "It's not for us... no..."

"You're not thinking!" Emily wheezed with alarm as she grabbed Zac's arm.

Zac could barely hear her as his body shuddered with barely contained desire. So what if it was a seal? Could it be compared to the boundless grandeur of the Void? If anything, it was his birthright. He was the one who made Ultom stir. His ancestor was part of the undertaking to raise the pillars. What was one bite?

The senseless idea was rendered moot when the seal suddenly released a familiar pulse. The incredibly durable stone was utterly incapable of resisting, and a sphere thirty meters across instantly disintegrated. A rain of dust fell through the hole in the ceiling, and Zac took a shuddering breath as he woke up from his delirious state.

"Dissipate my butt," Emily muttered. "I can't believe you managed to scare it away."

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

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## Chapter 1153: Breaking In

Zac blankly looked at the spherical hole left in the wake of the seal's escape, the surprise so great he was brought back to reality. Had his bloodline really scared the seal to the point it escaped prematurely?

"Uh," Zac said as he stepped forward to inspect the damage. "Maybe?"

It was extensive. The seal hadn't just carved a hole through the ceiling, but also the two floors above. The devastation below was the same, giving the

two a good cross-section of the tower's makeup. The space between the levels was as large as the floors and filled with a dense, weblike metal mesh that had to be part of the tower's arrays.

It was clear that not even these inaccessible floors had been spared from the dimension's collapse. Zac observed multiple spots damaged by spatial tears in the small section. Other sections had exploded, likely because of the damage to the arrays. The ancient fortress must have incredible redundancy layers to still operate with such extensive damage.

However, not even the tower could shrug off a 30-meter bite being taken out of its upper levels. Hundreds of runes were flickering precariously, and energy was rapidly building in the surroundings.

"Damnit!" Zac swore as arrays in every direction came alive.

The eruption had destroyed the door they planned to enter, saving him a token charge. However, the corridor beyond had fully activated its defenses, and it was just a matter of time before the sentinels appeared. The same was happening in every direction.

Except for one place.

"Let's go!" Zac urged, flying straight through the dusty haze.

The hole had no arrays to activate, and it provided a path straight to the top. However, gravitational forces poured into the gap from every direction. Soon, it felt like they were trying to ascend the Heavens. Emily faltered first, but Zac caught her with an arm as he activated **[Void Zone]**. It was barely enough to keep ascending, though the price was the hunger growing more intense.

The sphere had barely reached the final floor, so Zac had to temporarily unequip **[Ossuary Bulkwork]** and modify his body shape with **[Million Faces]** to squeeze through. They found themselves in a dark, silent room, exactly what Zac hoped to see. The command center's defenses hadn't been triggered, leaving only the hole to worry about.

"We need to do something about this," Emily said nervously, echoing Zac's thoughts.

Zac's face scrunched up with reluctance as he took out a Longevity Treasure. He'd consciously saved a sliver of Creation Energy when recovering his lost

limbs. He'd hoped to keep it in case he got hurt inside the tower, but it looked like he'd have to use it to patch up the floor.

A small surge of Creation Energy was extracted, and Zac quickly pushed it out of his body before his bloodline could steal it. His mental state was in disarray, but he had enough experience to successfully fill the breach with an exact replica of the floor.

Of course, the similarities were just cosmetic. He didn't have the Creation Energy to create the real thing, so he had to settle for looks. Not to mention that Zac doubted the Shards of Creation could replicate such strong materials. Even if they did, the life force drain would probably kill Zac where he stood.

Emily covered the patch with a door she'd picked up on the way, and Zac placed almost a hundred Gravity Crystals on top. The extravagant arrangement made Zac feel the pinch, and the shimmering crystals made his cells scream with hunger. At least it afforded some protection while they figured out the next step.

While the arrangement was hastily put together, getting past them would be a herculean task. Even he wouldn't be able to budge the door with the immense weight pushing down on it. Not to mention, Zac could still sense the immense energy fluctuations on the floors beneath them. Still, they'd have to be fools to underestimate the outsiders, and Zac knew their setup couldn't stop the sentinels. They had to hurry.

There was a clear difference between the dusky room they'd appeared in and the rooms they'd explored over the past hours. For one, it was completely untouched by the ravages of space, just like the Tribulation Throne. The dark grey tiles on the walls lacked any engravings, but looking at them felt like gazing into a black hole. There was an immense weight hidden within, but not a speck of it leaked out.

Zac suspected they were C-grade materials, though the long years might have depreciated their strength. Still, they'd never be able to break into this room if not for the seal's timely assistance.

The room was roughly fifteen meters across, holding five tables that were bigger versions of the consoles in the Tribulation Throne. Four tables still appeared to be in working order, but Zac didn't dare approach without a plan. They had essentially broken in, and the fact the room was silent didn't mean it was safe. One wrong move could spell disaster.

"This isn't right," Emily muttered. "We're in the right place, but the Command Center should be the size of a football stadium. This room wouldn't take up more than a small corner."

"This must be some side chamber not on the map," Zac said and nodded at the sole door in the room. "The real thing should be out there."

"Let's go," Emily nodded.

Zac took out the **[Court Cycle Token]**, finally feeling a sliver of hope upon reaching the finish line. A sliver that quickly shattered when Zac felt a powerful rejection in his mind. The token didn't work. Zac mutely looked at the door, his mind blank over the abrupt end of their journey.

"Should we go back?" Emily ventured.

"Doubt it'd help," Zac frowned. "If the token doesn't work here, it probably won't at the other entrances, either."

"There's no way we can blast this guy open," Emily said before turning to the consoles. "These things, then?"

"Let's check it out," Zac said. "Don't activate anything just yet."

"By the way, two Starfall Courts in a row? What are the odds?" Emily commented as they walked over.

"Higher than you'd think," Zac said. "Remember the name of this place?"

"You think Reignenders have some special ability in here?" Emily exclaimed.

"I think it's possible, if not likely," Zac nodded. "Who knows? It might not be the token that lets me open the doors, but the mark of the Starfall Court on it."

"They are way more prepared than us. Even the Technocrats have ways to hide from the tower defenses," Emily said. "A shame Ra'Klid isn't here. He might have been able to take us out."

"Well, no one has more experience in dealing with the Limitless Empire than the Technocrats," Zac shrugged before shaking his head helplessly. "This is pointless. I have no idea how to check whether these consoles are guarded."

"Where is Kenzie when you need her," Emily sighed before looking at Zac apologetically. "Ah—I'm sorry."

"Don't worry about it," Zac said as he looked around with a smile. "You're right. How could this fortress have stopped her? She would have built some master key, opening doors left and right."

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"Right?!" Emily laughed. "She would have seized those guardians and have them round up all these troublemakers."

Zac grinned, but his smile turned crooked when whirring sounds came from the door—had their boastful conversation angered the tower to the point it sent sentinels to teach them a lesson? Of course, the far more likely answer was that the outsiders had already claimed the Command Center. Had they heard them somehow? Or had his attempt to open the door been exposed?

There was no time to prepare like the last time they found themselves in a similar situation. Emily disappeared within a camouflage array while Zac shot forth, his axe already on the move when the door abruptly opened. Five gruff men were waiting on the other side with gleaming weapons.

Their reactions were surprisingly sluggish when they saw Zac burst through the door, which gave Zac the window of opportunity he needed. Zac felt a weak flicker as he passed through an invisible barrier, and **[Verun's Bite]** descended on the leader in the middle. However, a spark of recognition made Zac freeze in place, stopping his axe just before he lobbed off his target's head.

"It's you?!"

The burly soldiers quickly regained their composure. They glared at Zac with murderous gazes, but they didn't dare move with the axe levied against the throat of one of their own. Zac barely spared them a glance, his mind abuzz as distant memories of a squirrely merchant gradually converged with the ferocious warrior before him.

"Galau? Is that really you?" Zac asked to confirm as he released his orcish disguise and retracted **[Ossuary Bulwark]**'s helmet.

How did his old friends keep popping up in the least expected places? First Ogras, and now this old companion who elicited their services back in the Tower of Eternity. He hadn't heard from Galau since they split ways in the Base Town. Pretty Peak had expeditiously whisked him away to save Galau from his own family. This chapter is updated by NoveFire.net

After all, Zac's renown was far from its current level back then, and he had just killed a whole lot of scions, including a Dravorak prince. The last update he got on Galau was when he met Pretty Peak inside the Void Star. Galau had been given a new identity before being sent into the Million Gates Territory along with Greatest and Average Peak. They were among the vanguard who sought to discover where the Kan'Tanu came from, but something happened to their army before the war even began.

"Wait, this is where you ended up after disappearing?" Zac said, recalling Pretty's original purpose in visiting the Void Star. "Is Average here as well?"

Zac scanned the gruff men standing behind Galau. None matched the features of the young Pugilist he met during a quest in the early stages of the Integration. Zac sighed, vaguely understanding the situation by the state of the soldiers. All but one were missing limbs, and odd spiderweb scars covered their skin.

It was almost incomprehensible how Galau and his squad had not only survived inside the fortress for years but even reached its command center. The accomplishment must have come at a heavy price, and Zac feared Average was among those lost. It was a huge disappointment. It was Greatest who provided the bangle, which kept his identity safe until Leandra gave him the array to hide his Duplicity Core.

Pretty had helped him in various ways, too. Zac still felt indebted to the Peak family, and he'd hoped to be able to bring back better news than this.

Galau slowly blinked a few times, seemingly having even greater trouble adapting to the sudden appearance of an old acquaintance. The soldiers to his sides had become increasingly tense, and it looked like they were about to risk their lives to save their companion. However, Zac finally saw a flicker of recognition in Galau's eyes, so he removed his axe and stepped back.

"It's fine. Stone pillar," Galau said with a trembling voice, which made the soldiers relax and look at Zac curiously.

"A comrade? Really?" the strongest of the warriors said. "This boy knows the little commander? Never seen him."

"You've heard of him. Remember the guy I met in the Tower of Eternity?" Galau said before his wandering gaze stopped at the patched-up hole Zac came from. "Shit!"

"You're that bloodthirsty lunatic?!" the middle-aged soldier exclaimed. His words were harsh, but his face veritably shone with adoration and excitement. "Little Shartermaster has told us all about you!"

"Nice to meet you—What are you doing!" Zac shouted.

He wasn't talking to the soldiers. His outburst was triggered by Galau, who had rushed to one of the central consoles of the Command Center. That was worrying enough, considering the wrong move could summon a slew of sentinels. However, Galau went even further, ripping off one of the metal covers on the back to dig around inside.

"Are you trying to get us killed?" Zac screamed.

If it were a stranger, Zac would have unhesitantly launched a killing blow upon seeing such a foolhardy measure, but the familiar face made him hesitate. Emily wasn't tied down by such sentiments. She burst forth from her hiding spot, turning into a streak that deftly dodged the surprised soldiers to place a tomahawk against Galau's neck.

"Not another move."

Zac was prepared to block the soldiers before things took a bad turn. However, none of them moved to save their companion. They looked at Emily like she was a goddess descended from the Heavens.

"A beauty! A warrior queen!"

"Bubbur, you traitor! I have an axe trained at me, you bastard!" Galau growled at the grizzly veteran who had spoken. More alarmingly, his hands didn't stop moving despite the tomahawk drawing blood. "And the rest of you? Useless!"

"We'll name our firstborn after you to honor your sacrifice," the grizzly veteran grinned.

Emily looked at Zac, who hesitantly nodded. These people had possibly survived in the fortress for years, and the soldiers looked absolutely relaxed despite Galau's actions. They should know what they were about. Emily shrugged and removed her tomahawk, teasingly glancing at Bubbur.

"You think I'd give my child such a disgusting name? And I'm not interested in weak men. We can talk about dating after you beat my teacher."

"Young lord, I've collected some good stuff over the years. How about letting me have this one? We can make the spar look real enough," Bubbur whispered.

"This isn't the time to joke around," Zac said, desperately pushing down a pang of hunger. "What are you doing? A single mistake will bring a calamity on our heads."

"That's what I'm trying to prevent," Galau said as he deftly manipulated a set of runes. A jolt of energy suddenly scorched his fingers, and Zac immediately regretted trusting these castaways. Galau didn't seem disappointed, though. He exhaled in relief and put back the backplate. "There. I modified the automated defenses. The guardians will guard the hole you lunatics created. It should buy us some time."

"You're pretty good, *Shartermaster*," Emily said as she looked at Galau with interest.

"Thank you," Galau coughed. "And my name is actually Galau, quartermaster of the Muscle Brigade. Or former quartermaster, maybe? I don't know."

"The muscle brigade still exists," Zac said, realizing what Galau meant. "The planet you visited suddenly disappeared, causing a huge Spatial Storm. Your ship was destroyed, but Greatest Peak managed to save most of his men and bring them out of the Million Gates Territory. The experience actually let him break through."

"That's great, that's great!" a soldier said with a shaky breath. "Little lord, did you hear?!"

Zac followed the man's gaze, his mouth opening with surprise when three more soldiers appeared from a camouflage array nearby. They'd done the same thing as Emily, but Zac hadn't sensed their presence at all. Not even



when he was holding Galau hostage, which was shocking considering how strong his danger sense and Luck were.

He should have sensed at least a flicker of Killing Intent, letting him realize someone else was hiding in the room. The array had to be far greater than any common arrangement for Zac not to sense a thing.

"I told you, how could the old man possibly die before he got the chance to wreak havoc on the battlefield?" Average grinned as he walked over. "Long time no see. I should have guessed a troublemaker like you would appear at the eleventh hour. Damn, you ok? You look like a starving beast."

"I'm suppressing a breakthrough," Zac said. "You need to—"

"Ah, boss? Why did you change your clothes?" one of the soldiers leered, interrupting Zac's train of thought.

"Bastard, don't talk about unnecessary stuff!"

"Thank the Heavens it was friendlies," another soldier muttered. "Those Technocrats are no joke. I don't think we'd be able to deal with a whole gaggle of them."

"You've already encountered those guys?" Zac asked, noticing that Average and the soldiers who'd just appeared all had unstable auras.

So, part of the reason they hid was because of their wounds.

"Not in person," Galau said as he made a beeline for the consoles in the side chamber Zac came from. "I've been throwing up roadblocks for those bastards since they began cropping up, but they take them down one after another. They'll eventually deal with my tampering, so we have to be quick."

"Quick with what?" Zac asked. "What's going on? What are you up to?"

"Shouldn't that be our question?" Average countered. "We ended up in this netherblasted prison years ago. So how did you reach this place, and when did those meddling heretics get mixed up with the war? I thought we were fighting cultists?"

Zac took a steadying breath to center himself before recounting the situation in broad strokes. The sudden twists had almost made him lose control over

his bloodline again. Luckily, there were no treasures nearby to push him over the edge.

"So things have already reached this point," Average muttered before his eyes lit up. "At least it sounds like our plan has a good chance of working out, provided the heretics don't kill us first."

"What plan?"

"Uh," Galau coughed, looking at Zac apologetically.

The merchant seemed to be feeling bad for him and Emily, though not to the point his fingers stopped moving as he tampered with one of the consoles in the side chamber. Zac started to get a bad feeling, one that only grew stronger upon seeing bloodthirsty grins appear on the soldiers.

"We're blowing this place up and taking as many damn cultists with us as we can!" Average laughed, confirming Zac's fears.

Emily groaned and clutched her head in despair. "You really do know each other."

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

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## Chapter 1154: Blaze of Glory

"You're planning on going out in a blaze of glory?" Zac grimaced. "There's no way out?"

Zac looked at the huge room with its hundreds of consoles, pillars, and the screens displaying the situation outside. The storm had drastically worsened since he escaped into the tower, and long streaks of broken space danced through the air. The Mystic Realm wasn't long for this world, and there was no way out?

Would he have to throw Emily and the others into a Spatial Tear and hope for the best? Or should he stop Galau's plan? Did he even have the ability to? Who knew how many arrays and settings the merchant had manipulated before they arrived?

"Don't worry, it's not quite as stupid as it sounds," Galau quickly said when he saw Zac's brooding silence. "We've arranged an escape route. It's just that it's, uh, theoretical. It's not designed to withstand the mayhem we're about to unleash."

Zac breathed out in relief. He could live with theoretical or unsafe so long as they weren't trapped. "You had me worried there. Catch me up to speed."

"Like you said, our unit was trapped here, what, four years ago? We were split up. Average and his men were stuck in the underbelly for long. Our luck was slightly better. We found ourselves in a repository containing a lot of information on the arrays that run this place. And with it, there was a mysterious opportunity."

Zac was about to tell Galau to skip to the important part, but the last word caught his interest. "An opportunity? A seal?"

"You know about it." Galau nodded. "It gave me the foundations in arrays to gradually overcome the defenses of this place. My initial plan was to find Average and then get the hell out of here. Simple enough, but it proved easier said than done. The fortress was in lockdown, and we couldn't activate the teleporters we found."

Seeing that everything was in hand, the soldiers spread out. Two took up posts by the main door while the rest left through an unlocked door on the opposite side of the hall. Only Bubbur stayed behind to keep watch over the breach and guard Galau while he continued his work on the console.

"We needed to turn off the lockdown, which could only be done from the main switch up here," Average continued with a wave. "But we weren't strong enough to enter the tower. It took us years of collecting resources and training to get here, all while dealing with this old trash heap's self-destructive tendencies."

"Only the eight of us remain," Galau sighed. "The rest gave their lives to let us reach this point. Two days ago, we finally broke into the Command Center."

"Two days ago?" Emily exclaimed. "So just before signs of the fortress appeared on the frontlines?"

"Yeah, that was probably us," Galau sighed. "The only way to undo the lockdown was to activate the fortress. We didn't expect it to cause such chaos on the outside. We believed we were still in the depths of the Million Gates Territory. A day later, people came pouring through spatial tears, and we figured the war had already spread to the region where we disappeared."

"You said you activated the fortress to use the teleporters," Zac interjected. "But the one we discovered was still sealed? It didn't work?"

"Well... It did," Average slowly said. "But Galau found something while going through these consoles. A way to deliver a painful blow to our enemies."

Zac and Emily shared a look. Could it be that Galau and company had already discovered the project and planned to activate it? Zac had to admit their sacrifice made sense if that were the case. How could the lives of a few low-grade cultivators be compared to unleashing an ancient weapon on the Kan'Tanu?

"It's the right call from what you told us. These cultist bastards are too strong. Can't let them dig any deeper into the empire," Bubbur growled. "We'll have them choke on the **[Centurion Spear]**."

"Unfortunately, activating the weapon drastically hastened the spatial collapse," Galau said. "The fortress understands that and has been trying to shift into a main dimension as a safety precaution. Of course, nothing works like it should on this old thing. It's essentially banging its head against the wall and registering the damage as an outside attack. It's like a snake eating its own tail."

"That's why our escape route is so dangerous?"

"Exactly. I've tried to stop it, but it's impossible. The launch sequence has been activated as an emergency and can't be interrupted by any means."

"So even if we stop this **[Centurion Spear]** of yours, we won't be able to safely escape?" Zac concluded.

"I'm sorry, we didn't think things would play out like this when we activated the weapon," Galau said with a helpless smile. "We planned on activating the thing before sailing off into the sunset."

"So what exactly is your plan?" Zac asked. "And how can we increase our odds of survival?"

"The **[Centurion Spear]** is what's destroying the fortress, but it's also our best chance at survival. If activated successfully, it'll tear a massive hole right through the dimensional storm, one large enough for the whole fortress to slip through. We plan to jump ship at that exact moment. There are escape pods in the next room."

"Jumping out in the wake of such a powerful attack is incredibly dangerous," Emily frowned. "Why not hide inside the tower a bit longer? This room should be the safest place when we fire the weapon."

"Well, uh," Galau coughed. "The tower doesn't fire the **[Centurion Spear]**. The tower *is* the **[Centurion Spear]**."

"Wait, what?"

"We're throwing the whole tower at the Kan'Tanu," Average laughed. "So it won't be safe for long. It'll rapidly pick up speed until it hits a target or explodes. We need to leave before it's too late, even if it means braving the spatial turbulence."

"Can't we use the escape pods now?" Zac asked, even if he knew the answer by looking at the screen.

"They're also locked down as part of the tower's futile launch protocol," Galau said. "Besides, what good would going outside do? Space is springloaded to catapult us forward. The vessels will get ripped apart. I feel bad, but there's no way to stop our plan and let you out. We've entered the final stage, and trying to disperse the accumulated energies will probably disintegrate the whole Mystic Realm."

"I get it," Zac said. "Might as well go for it and see if you can take out some cultists. But how will you throw the tower at them? Even I have no idea where the Kan'Tanu bases and motherships are hiding. You're just as likely to hit our own as our enemies."

"This navigation room was the final missing piece," Average explained. "We have records of the Kan'Tanu's cursed aura, and Galau is installing a module that'll train the spear on the strongest matching source within range. We originally hoped to blow up the Space Gate that way, or at least the base protecting it. Now that we're outside the Million Gates Territory, we'll probably have to settle for some of their frontline bases."

"We had to take a risk forcing the door open when we noticed there had been a breach," Galau said. "Luckily, it was just you. How did you tear a hole through the floor, by the way?"

"Not me. I killed a guy who turned out to be a sealbearer. The seal did the rest."

"That'd do it," Bubbur grunted. "We saw one of those things take out an entire building."

"What kind of range are we talking about here?" Zac asked. "There should be a C-grade base and motherships in the region, but there's nothing like that in this solar system."

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"Solar system?" Galau said with a ruthless grin. "There's no place in Zecia the **[Centurion Spear]** can't reach."

Zac shuddered, and he looked at the merchant with shock. The Limitless Empire was really not playing around when it came to war.

"Well, that's if it was still working order," Galau added. "Now? Who knows? It might blow up before accomplishing anything, taking us with it. We still thought it was worth pursuing."

"No, I'm all for it," Zac said as a smile appeared on his face. "I'm just shocked at how much you've changed. Every little thing made you have a panic attack back then."

"Ha! Don't trust that disguise," Bubbur guffawed. "Did you know this shifty bastard tricked you and your friend? He told us all about it the day we emptied the last of our drink."

"What?"

"Why are you talking about unnecessary things," Galau glared. "In fact, why are you just standing there? Don't you think this guy can guard the breach? Go look at the pods to see if there's anything else you can do."

"Not much I can do about those things, though," Bubbur said as he scratched his chin. "Up to the Heavens now, really."

"How long—urgh," Zac groaned as he fell to his knees.

Repeatedly using his bloodline during the final dash had come at a price. The hunger was overwhelming, forcing Zac to shut out everything to keep it in check. Only a few breaths later did his body calm down, and he unsteadily got back to his feet.

"Not sure how reliable this guy is," Bubbur muttered, quickly raising his hands in defeat when Emily and Galau glared at him. "I'm kidding. Repairs, right? I guess I can't make things worse."

Zac took a few deep breaths as he retracted his senses. They had spread out to the resources on the floor below, and he almost opened another vortex. He'd managed to stop it, but it was still there, calling him.

Finding Galau and Average was a blessing, though one that complicated his situation. He'd envisioned himself pushing some big stop button and sending off Emily before beginning his breakthrough. Now, he was stuck waiting for Galau to install the last pieces of a Kan'Tanu-seeking tower bomb.

"What the hell were those energies? Never felt anything like it, and that's after finding all kinds of odd things in here," Average said with round eyes. "You'll explode if you keep forcing it down. Why not just break through?"

"The process is extremely energy-hungry. There's a high risk I'll accidentally extract all energy-dense materials nearby," Zac sighed as he pointedly looked at Average's stomach.

"Damn, you're still doing crazy things," Average muttered and took another step back.

"How much longer?" Zac asked again.

"Ten minutes, tops," Galau said fearfully. "Can you—"

"I'll manage," Zac grunted. "Is there anything we can do to help?"

"Help the others strengthen the shields on the escape pods," Galau said without hesitation. "They don't even need to be stable. We're all Hegemons. It's fine even if the ship blows up, so long as it takes us through the energy storm. Do you know anything about barriers or Cosmic Vessels?"

"Not even a little. I only know how to hit things with my axe," Zac said, which awarded him a nod of approval from Average.

"Then how did you get this far?" Galau asked with a confused look.

"I found a Limitless Empire authority token," Zac explained, fudging the truth since the true nature of the **[Court Cycle Token]** couldn't be made public. Even if their cockeyed plan worked, they'd definitely be interrogated after leaving. "Emily might be able to help, though."

"I have a few things in my ring that might work," Emily nodded before walking over to Zac to whisper. "What about you? You're not thinking of staying behind, right?"

"I—" Zac hesitated.

Thanks to the Tribulation Throne, he wasn't strictly required to stay behind. A new source of treasure and energy had appeared on the home front, spreading around his Draugr half. The view from atop the monolith was drastically different after he came to, and not just because he suddenly found himself hundreds of meters higher up.

The monolith no longer stood in the city's central square but atop the central dome of an enormous complex that stretched a few miles in every direction. Zac had missed its appearance because of the lightning, but it didn't seem like the building had risen from the ground. It felt more like it had appeared from a spatial fold.

The whole city had undergone a tremendous change, where dozens of grand buildings untouched by the mark of time had joined the roof-covered ruins. Despite that, there were no signs of buildings being destroyed or pushed aside to make room. Google search N(o)VEL(F)ire.net



The buildings below appeared spiritual rather than military. Most of the subsidiary buildings were large temples, with a few possibly being the homes of nobility. Even the enormous citadel below should be a cathedral, though the line between clergy and nobility had to be blurry when the Emperor was considered both an earthly leader and a heavenly deity.

The transformation made Zac think of a paper fortune teller. His best guess was that the whole region was crisscrossed by spatial folds that had eluded their investigations. Activating the monolith had unraveled them all in one go, exposing their hidden fortunes. At least Zac assumed the activation had unraveled all folds, but who knew? There might be even grander buildings waiting to be unsealed.

There was not much point in doing so, though. The buildings that had appeared were all protected by immense barriers reinforced by Imperial Faith. Zac wasn't confident he'd be able to force his way inside even after reaching Peak Hegemony. Their appearance felt more like a liability, considering how the alliance had reacted upon discovering the fortress.

More to the point, dozens of treasures emitting fate's pull had appeared among the buildings while the ambient energy was rapidly rising. If it came to it, he could use the Ensolus Ruins as a main energy source for his breakthrough.

However, Zac was incredibly reluctant to do so, especially after learning of the **[Centurion Spear]**. Why ruin a huge opportunity he could collect when things had calmed down when he could use the tower treasures instead? It wasn't like the stockpiled materials or hidden treasures were needed for Galau's plan to work. Leaving them behind felt like setting fire to a mountain of money.

Besides, what if the armies waited on the other side? He would be breaking through right in front of a bunch of Monarchs.

Better do it inside the tower if possible. Any lingering evidence would disappear when the **[Centurion Spear]** did. The question was, could he escape the tower after the weapon had activated, and was he confident he could control his breakthrough well enough not to ruin Galau's plan? The answer to both was a resounding maybe.

"Don't worry, I'll figure something out," Zac said. "For now, help—"

His words were interrupted by a deep thump, and Zac whirled around with his axe at the ready. The sound came from the door in the distance. The soldiers guarding it were tense, but one eventually gave them a thumbs up.

"What the hell was that?" Zac said. "Are people trying to break in?"

"For the last couple of hours," Galau sighed. "Usually not by force, though. They should know better. I've done my best to block their tampering, but I'm running out of tricks. We'll have to pray the doors will hold until I'm done. At that point, it doesn't matter if they break inside. It'll be impossible to stop or redirect the attack."

"Is it the Technocrats? Are they after the **[Centurion Spear]**?"

"It might be them, but it's not their main goal," Average said. "We've followed their movements. First, they broke into a subsidiary control station for the Scouting Division. That's how we noticed we had company. Actually, they arrived even before the others came falling out of spatial tears."

"They targeted the scanners? They didn't try to hijack the tower?"

"Weirdly enough, they only extracted a bunch of old logs before moving on," Galau said. "They didn't even try to access the main systems, as far as I can tell."

"Are they in the project operations wing now?"

"Oh, you found out about that as well?" Galau exclaimed with surprise, briefly looking up from the confusing mesh within the console.

"Do you know the details?"

"I'm afraid not. We only found some bits and pieces over the years. This place is called the Sixth Centurion Lighthouse. There are supposedly seven more, but who knows if they're still around. All eight were involved in a secret weapons research project at the empire's edge. They had to keep a rotation because the environment in the experiment's dimension was extremely dangerous.

"We tried to extract their research before leaving. We'd be immortalized as Zecia's heroes if we brought back that kind of firepower," Average said with frustration. "We lost three men before we were forced to give up. I don't

understand how those heretic bastards made it past the defenses so quickly. That wing is like a fortress within a fortress."

"I heard that the Technocrats were one of the main enemies of the Limitless Empire," Zac said.

"No wonder," Average spat. "No one knows you as well as your greatest enemy."

Zac nodded before turning to Emily. "For now, see if you can help patching up the ships. No matter how things shake up, we'll need them in perfect condition."

Emily nodded, and Average led her to the corridor the soldiers entered earlier. Zac was left alone with Galau, who furiously engraved new paths to hotwire an Array Disk into the navigation console. Zac stayed close to the doorway of the side room, where he could keep watch on the breach and the door that had just been attacked.

The minutes passed in silence. Zac was left alone to fight his personal war, a war he was rapidly losing. The Void was already moving on its own. He could feel its hidden tendrils spread through the tower, floor by floor, in search of sustenance. He'd become like a small tree with a root network the size of a city. He'd given up on all else, settling for keeping the vortices shut just a little longer.

Zac could feel his body gradually exerting a stronger pull, and his mind twisted as his gaze stopped at the merchant. Galau had a treasure within his body, and who knew what kind of items he'd stockpiled during his years of stay. He was a walking pill that could push him toward...

An excited exclamation thankfully interrupted that taboo line of thought.

"I'm done! It's all set!"

Zac exhaled and got to his feet. He'd made it. Now, he just needed to get these people as far away from him as possible. Because like a tree, Zac knew he was stuck. The Void wouldn't let go of the riches it had discovered.

Like it or not, he'd have to break through inside a rocket hurled at the strongest cultists in Zecia.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

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## Chapter 1155: Light and Darkness

"This is the central console for the **[Centurion Spear]**. When I activate it, it'll trigger all the protocols I've installed over the past day," Galau said, looking at Zac nervously. "After that, it shouldn't take more than half a minute before it's launched."

"If I stay longer?" Zac said, his voice hoarse from tension. "How long before it'll reach its target?"

"Uh," Galau hesitated. "I don't know. Half an hour, maybe? It'll continuously speed up after piercing through the dimensional storm, though. Why are you asking? The relative speed will rip you apart if you stay any longer than our window."

"My situation is complicated," Zac grunted. "Activate it and escape with the others. Don't worry about me. I have my methods. I'll see you on the outside. And don't expose your identity as a sealbearer."

Galau opened his mouth to argue, but something about Zac's gaze made him sigh and nod in agreement. Instead, he took out a communicator. "Get ready, everyone! I'm activating the spear."

*'I'm afraid I cannot let you do that, my friend.'*

An intense scream of peril penetrated Zac's hazy consciousness. Ingrained experience made Zac's body move on instinct, dragging Galau to the side of the room just as a small golden sigil appeared on the main entrance. Then, there was only blinding white and a sense of immense majesty. Zac felt his back being lacerated, and millions of small blades pierced him as he shielded the merchant with his body. Thankfully, miniature projectiles were made of energy and Dao, which reduced them to fuel before they could cause any damage to his insides.

The overwhelming light disappeared as quickly as it came, and Zac's heart sank upon seeing the fallout. A good chunk of the console was gone, including the control crystal Galau was about to use. The console was dim and without energy, and it was impossible to say whether the situation could be salvaged. That wasn't the only problem they faced. Zac grimly turned to the door, **[Verun's Bite]** already in his hand.

While the voice had come from a speaker inside the room, the attack came from the outside. Nothing remained of the two soldiers who had kept watch of the door. They had been disintegrated by the sudden burst of light, leaving only a few scraps of their equipment behind. Worse, the attack had carved a small hole through the reinforced security door, a testament to its immense power.

The sizzling breach was no larger than a needlepoint, but that wasn't any different from it being blown wide open for most cultivators. As expected, an unfamiliar figure appeared in a flash of light and curiously looked around the room before focusing on Zac and Galau.

He was human, though the man made Zac think of an angel with his golden locks, matching irises, and long flowing robes. His features were immaculate, and his expression was soft. There was even a golden halo of the Dao of Light behind him. Yet, Zac felt a fatal threat as he looked into the newcomer's eyes.

This person was dangerous.

It wasn't because he clearly was a high-ranking imperial or that his Middle D-grade aura greatly surpassed that of the Late D-grade deathsworn captains. There was darkness hidden within the light, an evil that would strike you down if you weren't careful.

"To think I had to expend the blessing of my Royal Father to open a door. They're in short supply, you know," the imperial said with a helpless smile. "I suppose that's a miscalculation on my part. I didn't expect you natives to manipulate these systems with such speed and command."

"Bastard!" Galau roared as he threw out an ancient array disk.

A flickering flood dragon with the power of stars poured out of the disk, drowning the command center in a lofty aura. However, it only got halfway to its target before a bracelet on the imperial's arm morphed into a demonic

creature. Zac frowned at its appearance because it actually had a similar aura to the Qriz'Ul goblins of the Lost Plane.

It wasn't exactly the same, but it definitely shared a common origin. Had this man found a place similar to the Ra'Lashar Kingdom? There wasn't any time to glean anything else. The dragon was cleanly ripped apart before the creature returned to the imperial's arm.

The battle was completely lopsided, but the brief distraction had been enough for Galau to flash to the damaged console's side and infuse it with his will. Zac opted to guard Galau from ambush instead of attacking. Activating the weapon took priority. Thankfully, the imperial seemed content to watch. He maintained his smile while observing Galau's actions, like he was following an amusing play. The link to the origin of this information rests in [NOVEL\\_Fire.net](#)

Nothing happened.

Zac paled as he was well aware of the ramifications. Failure to initiate the final step meant the **[Centurion Spear]** wouldn't activate properly, which meant the fortress would stay stuck in the crumbling subdimension. Energy would keep building until the weakest link broke, and the whole Mystic Realm would be wiped off the map. They were dead meat, even if this powerful stranger didn't deal with them first.

He had to buy some time while Galau came up with a solution.

"Royal Father? You're the prince of the Seventh Heaven?" Zac said as he positioned himself between the imperial and Galau.

"I'm Yselio Tobrial, and I'm indeed lucky enough to be a son of the Seventh Heaven," the man smiled as his eyes left Galau. "You must be Zachary Atwood. I'm very happy the Heavens has blessed me with the opportunity to make your acquaintance. If not for your triumphant ascent, it would have been difficult to deal with the Sindris Clan. Ah, before I forget, I also have to thank you for teaching my dear cousins a small lesson in the Perennial Vastness."

"Buddy, I have no idea what you're talking about," Zac grunted with an impassive face.

"Don't worry," Yselio laughed with a dismissive wave of his hand. "I've contained the news, though you should understand nothing is forever."

"Let me guess, some rumors might find their way back to the Seven Heavens if something happens to you?"

"Of course not. I never believed in making arrangements after one's death," Yselio laughed as he stepped further into the command center. "What do I care about the fallout after I die? And wouldn't I look the fool in case my Royal Father brought me back if I'd given away all my cards? Besides, the more value I hold, the greater my chances of resurrection.

"Therefore, I'm more about planning for victory. That way, I'll be the one to reap all the benefits when I succeed," Yselio continued, and it suddenly felt like all the air had been sucked out of the room. "And I don't need to rely on threats to seize this relic of a bygone era. I just need strength."

Zac's mind screamed of danger from the man's mere presence, to the point his bloodline showed signs of retreating into his body. He unleashed the full weight of his Killing Intent, hoping it'd give Yselio pause. Unfortunately, there was not a ripple on his face as he walked closer.

"If you stop us, this whole place will blow up!"

"Not before I've achieved my goals," Yselio smiled as his aura rose.

"Normally, I'd be happy to let you accomplish your goals. The idea of igniting a fading beacon of that glorious era is quite romantic, and it can potentially create interesting ripples. Unfortunately, it would make my matters difficult. There are still answers I seek, so blowing it up won't do."

"That thing!" Galau suddenly urged in a frantic whisper, and Zac slammed the **[Court Cycle Token]** on an outstretched Array Disk without missing a beat.

"You—!" Yselio exclaimed, the congenial façade cracking when the console fully came alive. "Why do you have that thing?!"

Zac ignored the princeling, his eyes beating with hope and anxiety as he felt a huge energy pull. The broken console lit up, and its resurrection was a trigger that spread throughout the room. An intense quake almost threw Zac off his feet, and small bubbles of space and gravity began falling like slow-motion rain.

It had begun, but they weren't out of the woods yet.

"Go! I'll hold him off!" Zac roared as golden-white runes appeared across his skin.

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Torrential amounts of Cosmic Energy poured through Zac's pathways, rekindling his weakened body that had seen most of its spirituality sapped by the vortices in his cells. The effects of **[Arcadian Crusade]** wouldn't last long, with his bloodline eroding the patterns it added to his spiritual body. However, it was enough to let him unleash a burst of empowered skills.

A primordial jungle took over the Command Center, and Zac pushed Galau into a tree that deposited him by the emergency exit with the others.

*'Leave without me!'* Zac urged Emily in a mental transmission. He'd noticed their presence just beyond the emergency door, ready to ambush Yselio. *'I'll see you on the outside.'*

*'Be careful!'*

A red-eyed Emily understood her presence would only hinder Zac against such a powerful enemy. She ushered the others into the hallway, leaving only Zac and Yselio in the large hall. Zac muttered a short prayer they'd escape safely as he shot forth in a furious blitz.

Zac knew he wasn't Yselio's match despite his recent gains. He could already tell the prince's Dao of Light had surpassed the level of Dao Branches, and that was only the tip of the iceberg. A careful approach to sound out the enemy would leave him at a helpless disadvantage, so Zac could only pursue a more dangerous path to victory. He'd go all out from the start, forcing an opportunity before Yselio could unleash his full power like Kator did at the end of their duel.

"Hold me off?" Yselio said, his eyes cold as ice as his halo exploded. "Are you worthy? Disrupting fate comes at a price, even for a flamebearer. Return what you've squandered."

The command center faded and was replaced by an imperial hall with two rows of tables facing each other. Further behind, rows of celestial soldiers formed, their golden eyes already looking at Zac like he'd encroached on the



Heavens. A great golden throne stood at the seat of honor, with Yselio standing before it.

An emperor and his court.

The celestial court swept the forest away without any struggle. The suppression was absolute, whether you looked at energy or Dao. In addition, the court was filled with immense amounts of Faith Energy, which gave the soldiers life and purpose. Gradually, outlines of magistrates and generals began forming by the empty tables. Their auras were shocking, like Yselio had conjured the great leaders of the Seventh Heaven.

The spores of **[Primal Edict]** similarly dissipated under the radiant splendor. No matter how much energy Zac pushed into the skill, it was all the same. He unleashed a furious barrage with **[Evolutionary Edge]** in an attempt to destabilize the domain. However, he couldn't find any weakness to target, and destroying the soldiers only resulted in new ones forming from bursts of light.

Zac couldn't even tell whether it was an illusion, a domain, or if a separate space had been formed. The approaching soldiers had passed through spots where consoles and array pillars should be, and he couldn't see the falling gravity spheres from before. The only thing Zac was somewhat certain of was that they were still within the command center since he could still feel the Void Network spreading through the tower.

"You seem confused?" Yselio smiled. "It's understandable. You shouldn't have seen a true expression of Imperial Qi before, considering such abilities are banned inside the Perennial Vastness. Valsa must have mistaken her Dynasty's glory with personal strength and believed herself infallible even without the support of her subjects. The First Heaven has ruled unopposed for a long time, leaving them complacent.

"Our family is different. We are the Seventh, the very last. It's almost a miracle we weren't consumed by the others in those early days. We're aware of our inadequacies, and we'll never forget that we have slowly climbed to our current heights through our subjects' grace. Emperor and Empire are one; the former cannot exist without the latter. I'd never set foot in a place where I couldn't use the true power of the Imperial Destiny."

It was suspicious that Yselio seemed content talking despite the dangerous situation, but Zac couldn't figure out what he was up to. But suddenly, he felt something passing through his network of Void Tendrils, and his eyes

widened in alarm. Yselio was also branching out, though he was targeting the nearby consoles rather than treasures.

The powerful domain left Zac helpless to stop their advance, but it couldn't stop the Void. He roused his bloodline, sicking it on the invading streaks of light like a pack of bloodhounds. The Void was more than happy to oblige after being denied sustenance for so long, and tendrils of nothingness began consuming the threads that spread from the Tobrial Prince.

"Hm?" Yselio muttered with a frown. "What—"

Zac couldn't let him investigate, so he threw caution to the wind. An immense drain on his Cosmic Core let him simultaneously activate three D-grade Talismans, one with Miasma, one with Divine Energy, and one unattuned. It was his most extravagant method to use his trinity core and the energy transmission was greatly accelerated by **[Arcadian Crusade]**.

Thousands of madly spinning blades joined two shrouds of opposing Dao, which created an out-of-control storm that swept through Yselio's domain. The paradox of his path was put on open display, destroying anything it touched. Golden soldiers were destroyed by the hundreds, and the radiant splendor of the court faded under the onslaught.

Zac didn't care about exposing his ability to use Miasma. He couldn't. He'd already been losing control, and using the Void to fight this way was like having a sword hanging over his head. Zac needed to finish the fight before his breakthrough started. They didn't take long, but Zac was completely helpless during that time. He'd be like a lamb to the slaughter before Yselio.

Suddenly, three runes appeared above the empty throne, reading 'Faith,' 'Strength,' and 'Unity.' As far as Zac could tell, they weren't true edicts, but they still radiated unquestionable might that greatly stabilized the court. Zac didn't care that the domain held, nor that significantly tougher counterparts replaced the destroyed soldiers.

The talismans had paved the path and temporarily nullified the suppression of Yselio's superior Dao. Zac's surroundings were painted the color of his path, and he used the opportunity to the fullest. Destructive forces coursed through his body as he shot straight for his target, with multiple Skill Fractals activating at once.

The resummoned soldiers were temporarily stalled by a repeatedly resummoned jungle in an epic struggle between the wilds and civilization. Zac swung his axe, unleashing two churning clouds. One was death, the other was life, each bolstered by the lingering energy from the talismans and the dimension's spatial decay. The unbridgable boundary between Life and Death clove through the courtyard, rapidly picking up strength and speed as it swept toward its target.

The corrupted beast reappeared, seemingly intent on taking the empowered **[Rapturous Divide]** head-on. Zac feared it would succeed, considering its display against Galau's Array Disk. A streak of white, gold, and red flashed right past the growing line of severance, and the creature was pushed out of the way when a second beast appeared with incredible speed.

It was Verun who had emerged in its spiritual form, radiating a bloodthirst that could shake the Heavens. The Tool Spirit didn't have the towering size it showcased during its breakthrough. Instead, it only reached three meters over the ground to match its opponents. Still, it had condensed the energy and power of its immense form into a smaller size, turning Verun into a weapon of matchless ferocity.

The domain's suppression couldn't stop the primordial hyena, nor could the radiant lights. They only served as a foil to its anger, and Verun unleashed it all on the demonic beast. A furious and brutal exchange of bites and swipes wreaked havoc on the surroundings, with dozens of golden soldiers becoming collateral as Verun forced the creature further from its master.

Zac saw his opportunity, adding oil to the fire by activating another skill he'd been channeling. Demarcation from the front and judgment from above struck simultaneously like a beast's maws snapping shut. Yselio's face never faltered as a radiant barrier enclosed him. The ground heaved from the collision, kicking up a storm of tumultuous energies.

The barrier effortlessly withstood both **[Arcadia's Jugment]** and **[Rapturous Divide]**, leaving Yselio unruffled and unscathed. The second stage of the skill didn't even activate, with the dais blocking the spikes from below. Still, the two skills had flooded Yselio's surroundings with a fog made from Zac's Daos and Energies.

Suddenly, a blurry form burst through the chaos, his aura perfectly blending with the surroundings. It was Zac, his eyes steely with murderous intent as he flew right into the barrier. The shield held without a ripple, though only

because Zac slipped right through it. He'd already released the breaks on his bloodline, and the Void freely coursed through his body, shifting him further out of phase with the Cosmos.

Vines launched with suicidal determination to bind their opponent for at least a fraction of a second. Zac's heart bled upon sensing Vivi burning her very limited life force to assist. Still, he turned the anger into an unbending conviction as he flooded his companion with Divine Energy bolstered by his Eoz nodes running at overdrive.

Determination and sacrifice wouldn't be enough. The gap between Vivi and their opponent was simply too great. However, she wasn't working alone. Three bloody vines sprung out of thin air, their steely wood adding another layer of restriction to share the load. It was the empowered creepers of **[Primal Edict]**, summoned with a mix of Cosmic and Void Energy to skip the incubation period.

Yselio seemed genuinely shocked that Zac had passed through his impermeable barrier to unleash a volley of instant attacks. It confirmed Zac's theory that Yselio hadn't discovered the nature of his bloodline, or at least that he wasn't privy to the full picture. It was the difference between life and death since Zac's whole plan hinged on timing and the element of surprise.

Void Energy flooded the surroundings as Zac activated **[Void Zone]**. Simultaneously, a golden laurel emitting an archaic aura instantly appeared on his head as a golden luster different from the celestial court's radiance flooded the area. **[Empyrean Aegis]** had been activated with Void Energy, adding another skill to the tally.

Zac hadn't activated the defensive skill with protection in mind. It was all to deliver his most disruptive combination with **[Void Zone]**. Yselio grunted as his energy backlashed while the Heavens were shrouded by the Void. Zac's right shoulder blade exploded at this exact moment, releasing streaks of utter nothingness that tore right through **[Ossuary Bulwark]**.

The sudden eruption acted like a booster that pushed Zac forward as the refined mix of Oblivion Energy, Miasma, and Cosmic Energy poured into **[Verun's Bite]**. A blade of condensed Annihilation formed, and it was as though time had stopped when it descended on Yselio's forehead. Every scrap of Zac's power and experience had crystallized into a singular moment where he put everything on the line.

The princeling's eyes were blank as Oblivion destroyed thought, fate, and future. Then, a greedy smile appeared on Yselio's lips as light turned into darkness and good into evil.

"Alone through a strange sea of thought... The legacy of the Void!"

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## Chapter 1156: Overwhelmed

An ominous presence filled the court when light and darkness were inverted, and the three glowing runes above the throne seemed to have taken on an entirely different meaning. The dusk was pervasive and suffocating, leaving Zac stunned at the realization that Yselio possessed not one but two Earthly Daos from the Peak of Taiji.

The prince's path appeared surprisingly similar to his own. Two opposing Daos from one peak, while Yselio used the Dao of Faith to give shape and context, instead of Zac's Dao of Conflict. Of course, their cultivation ultimately was completely different. Light was not Life, and Darkness was not Death. They held entirely different truths, and Yselio's path had nothing in common with Zac's.

Yselio's path seemed to reflect human nature, at least according to his personal worldview. Everything had two sides, and no one was purely good or evil. Perhaps it was his understanding of Imperial governance, where an Empire needed both glory and ruthless callousness to survive.

The sudden revelation of the true scope of Yselio's Daos was a huge blow, considering dealing with one Earthly Dao was hard enough. Fusing his Daos with his Dao Mold and elevating them with **[Spiritual Void]** would let them contend with Peak Branches, but the next step was an almost unbridgeable gap. Worse, Yselio had discerned Zac's path just as Zac had understood Yselio's. The Void had remained hidden since all who faced it had died.

Warning sirens blared in the back of Zac's mind from having his secrets laid bare, and Yselio's cruel smile gave the impression of a spider having trapped its prey. But what could he do? Zac knew he was like a released arrow. Every skill in his repertoire had been used to create this opening, and he'd crammed most of his Oblivion Energy into the skill fractal he'd named **[Extinction Event]**. Backing down only meant all that effort being wasted, and initiative would be in Yselio's hands.

He'd have to forge ahead, ensuring his sacrifice yielded some result.

Time paradoxically moved excruciatingly slow and shockingly fast as Zac's mind ran in overdrive. His muscles and sinew groaned with complaint as he pushed his aligned constitution to unprecedented heights in an effort to hasten the Oblivion Blade's final stretch on its journey. Zac could no longer see Yselio's eyes because of the pervasive darkness, but it felt like they were mocking him from the shadows.

A small backlash and a transferred notion of pain indicated the two sets of vines sealing Yselio's limbs had simply disappeared. The darkness shifted, and the bones in Zac's right arm creaked when his swing was abruptly stopped like it had hit a solid wall. **[Extinction Event]** was already an experimental skill, and the sudden collision made Zac lose 20% of its energy.

A billowing shockwave of Annihilation became a blight on its surroundings. Even the darkness was annihilated, giving Zac a better look at what'd happened. His ultimate strike had been blocked by a sword in Yselio's hand. The weapon was utterly black except for a singular dot of unblemished light above the hilt.

It emitted no aura, more acting like his Void by consuming all around it. Still, it wasn't hard to tell it was an unfathomable relic surpassing any of Zac's Spirit Tools. How else could it block a strike made from so much Oblivion Energy, with the only price being its edge fading a bit? In fact, the sword acted like a black hole, rapidly draining the energy of his strike.

Yselio looked different, draped in a robe darker than the Abyss, while his face hinted at unspeakable evil. Still, there was a small hope of salvation hidden in the depths of the brutal eyes, like the dot of light on the inky sword.

A stalemate meant loss, and loss meant death. Luckily, **[Extinction Event]** wasn't a physical manifestation. It was directed Annihilation unfettered by shape or form. The Oblivion Edge cleanly split in two, passing the sword by

when it couldn't destroy it. Yselio's eyes widened slightly, but there was no panic.

Reality split in two as light joined darkness, where a white-robed Yselio swung a second blade, this one a radiant white. It unleashed a cascading wave of light that consumed **[Extinction Event]** and Zac alike. Zac held on as long as he could, but he knew it was futile. He was already focusing on a hidden spot within his body when he lost the connection to his skill.

Zac couldn't see anything, even with his Soul Sense, but the lack of Kill Energy confirmed his gambit had failed. Yselio had proven too powerful, resisting Oblivion and Void alike. Zac had a few cards left, but none were as strong or reliable as those he'd already used. His only remedy now was to rely on Sendor's protection while finishing his breakthrough. By that point, he might be able to turn the tables on the Imperial Prince, if the Void hadn't already consumed him.

He acted decisively, but Yselio was even faster. Three arms and three swords fused into one that pierced toward Zac's torso. The stab moved with the speed of light and contained the weight of an empire. **[Void Zone]** barely managed to dim the blade's radiance as it skewered its nullification zone, and **[Ossuarby Bulkwark]** may as well have been made from brittle clay when faced with its tip.

A trinity of Dao and energy flooded Zac's body before his danger sense had the chance to activate, and not even the Void could approach the invading force. Blinding light irradiated his Soul Aperture, and Zac's Soul Cores began eroding under the unrelenting glow. It was like the light wanted to cleanse his whole aperture, leaving behind nothing but a blank slate. Cruel darkness buried his cells to stall the golden hurricanes within.

All the while, a towering majesty of Imperial Judgement overwhelmed his thoughts in an attempt to shatter his Dao Heart. The lightning-quick thrust simultaneously targeted the Soul, Body, and Heart, where a single weakness meant death. Zac would have instantly succumbed if not for his unusually holistic path.

Decades of hard work narrowly awarded him the resilience needed to endure while the vortices in his cells began consuming the three entrenched Daos. Zac desperately tried to disengage while refocusing on the Sendor's seal, but a wave of despair almost gave the Imperial Judgment an opening upon realizing killing him wasn't even Yselio's goal. Three miniature seals had



formed around Sendor's hidden impartment, stopping Zac's attempts to activate the life-saving grace.

"Don't be hasty," Yselio's voice carried through the blinding light. "Show me what else is hiding within your body."

The Tobrial scion gave no quarter or respite, following his taunt with a deadly thrust aimed at Zac's forehead. This time, he was only targeted by the white sword, but that was bad enough. Zac parried, relying on instincts and Luck since his eyes couldn't keep up. At that moment, a black blade pierced his back, wreaking havoc on his insides while injecting more hostile darkness.

It was the beginning of a desperate and confusing fight in the boundary between light and darkness, where just staying alive was asking more than Zac could give. He was fighting three Yselios at once, each possessing a Dao and power surpassing Zac's. They were both real and mirages, resulting from the prince's unbelievable speed and the Earthly Daos blocking Zac's senses.

Yselio's methods were furious, unforgiving, and unpredictable, where two swords occasionally fused into an empowered thrust before seamlessly separating again. Dozens of Dao-infested wounds had racked up within a second, and Zac was constantly forced to retreat and accept injuries to avoid death.

Zac kept trying to contact Sendor's seal, but the barrier was impregnable. It would take at least a few minutes to grind down the barrier, even with the Void's assistance. Time Zac absolutely didn't have. Activating skills with Cosmic Energy was out of the question, with a well-timed estoc disrupting the energy rotation. It was the same technique Zac had used many times on his enemies, though Yselio relied on raw speed rather than technique.

Void Energy couldn't be blocked, but what was the use? **[Evolutionary Edge]** was already running, powerless to turn the tides. His other skills were either on cooldown or unable to endure Yselio's domain. Verun fought furiously to break free and help out, but the corrupted beast was already a huge threat. It could consume spirituality, explaining how it so effortlessly had destroyed Galau's Array Dragon.

Zac couldn't keep backing down, even if he urgently needed a breather. The domain had drastically changed when the Dao of Darkness mixed with the Dao of Light. One moment, he saw the celestial court shrouded in darkness,



defended by the imperial guards. The next, he stood in the middle of a twisted dungeon filled with blood-soaked inquisitors wielding macabre tools of torture.

Guards and inquisitors were bearing down on him, ready to push an already helpless situation to certain death. Zac knew he'd have to take another gamble before it was too late, this one even more dangerous.

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One rune on the wooden handle of his axe already glowed with sanguine light, and the second one finally joined it after months of slumber. A roar from the ancient wilds shook Yselio's domain. Blinding light flickered and dimmed, and suffocating darkness dispersed. Out of nowhere, hundreds of smaller beasts formed, like a pack answering their leader's call to the hunt.

Soldiers and jailors were ripped to shreds, and Yselio's assault temporarily halted as the princeling found himself drowned by a frenzied pack that only kept growing. The three forms fused into one true form as his movement became restricted by relentless carnage.

Five swipes became a dozen bites, which grew and morphed into an unfettered storm of violence when dozens of primordial hyenas fused into a force of nature. Even space buckled under the assault, but Zac didn't hold any hope **[Primordial Call]** could contain Yselio for long, let alone take him out. It was a testament to the prince's power; even an ultimate skill with a month's cooldown requiring the blood of a hundred D-grade opponents to recharge couldn't change anything.

It was fine, so long as Zac got the small window needed to follow through on his plan. A large stone appeared in his hand, and a vortex instantly formed as Zac almost blacked out from hunger. It was the **[Stone of Celestial Void]**, the treasure Zac first saw in the Orom Exchange and later got from Iz Tayn. Zac was no longer holding back his breakthrough; he was kicking the doors wide open in hopes his bloodline would rip Yselio apart before he lost consciousness.

It was a desperate gambit, considering he couldn't control the Void well enough to use the vortices in battle. Especially not against an opponent moving so fast, Zac's eyes couldn't keep up. Unfortunately, it was the only solution he had left. He was all out of cards, and the only move left was to flip the whole table.

Hopefully, it would at least give Yselio pause and make him back down. Every second wasted meant a new lease of life, where new variables could provide a path to survival. Twenty-eight seconds had passed since Galau activated the **[Centurion Spear]**, though he'd only endured Yselio's onslaught for five. The rest of the time was through Yselio's stalling, which meant the **[Centurion Spear]** would fire any moment.

Hundreds of vortices opened as the tower's ransacking officially began, dragging treasures and piles of materials into the beyond with redoubled effort after having been held back so long. Zac gave his tacit blessing, only demanding one thing: bring the Void to him. He exerted his will, picturing a vast vortex ripping the whole domain asunder.

Zac felt blood vessels in his eyes burst as he strained with every fiber of his being, and he almost cried with relief when a ten-meter-vortex popped up in the middle of **[Primordial Call]**. It instantaneously consumed all around it, leaving a pocket of nothingness like an **[Annihilation Sphere]** had gone off.

A streak of exhausted spirituality poured into **[Verun's Bite]**. The Tool Spirit had already lost much of its spirit to the corrupted beast's attacks, and activating **[Primordial Call]** had exhausted what it had left. Its opponent was not much better off after having been pincered by Verun and its pack.

The situation had completely turned around, like it had many times before, thanks to Zac's bloodline and Void's inherently unpredictable nature. However, Zac barely had time to register the lack of Kill Energy before an immense beam tore through the Void. It shattered the vortex, depositing a pile of items and Void Energy before bearing down on Zac with undodgeable speed.

Zac saw death's approach and desperately tried to form another vortex. The Void resisted, like it understood it had just been damaged by the approaching force. Then, a huge halo of vibrant Life flooded the court, its splendor even surpassing the Dao of Light. Within, a familiar yet foreign flower swayed.

It was Vivi, looking as young and vibrant as a sapling as she grew thousands of vines to form an impenetrable wall before him. Zac's eyes briefly lit up before being clouded by despair. The beam was blocked, but not because of an opportune breakthrough. Verve was replaced by decay as Vivi's true form expended her last mote of life force.

The vine flower shattered like a mirror, her husk unable to endure the remnant energies. Zac's already frayed rationality almost snapped when he felt the mental connection break. Towering fury overwhelmed the hunger and took control of his bloodline. The Void had denied him when he needed it the most, so he would take from it what he needed, just like he took from the heavens. [Google search novel\(F\)ire.net](#)

The surroundings shifted as the distance became Void, and Zac found himself before a startled Yselio who had just returned from the beyond. The prince reacted instantaneously, but his thrusts passed through Zac without connecting with flesh. When the attack failed, Yselio decisively retreated, but the Void blocked his way. Zac stood behind him, before him, around him. His hands were vortices of cold retribution and connected to the one thing that best resonated with his mental state.

A deluge of murderous intent from an ancient era joined Zac's own, mixing and fusing into hatred manifest. The ancient Autarch's lingering will seemed to sense the target was a descendant of his enemy, and it stopped resisting Void's pull. The combined Killing Intent poured into Yselio, its quantity and focus surpassing what Zac previously endured many times over.

Yselio's eyes lit up like beacons, and writhing veins twisted his graceful features. He unleashed a bestial roar instilled with his full path, and the shockwave pushed even Zac away. But Zac wasn't ready to let go, and neither was the creature roused from his slumber by Vivi's demise.

Haro was wide awake, and his rage burned so hot that the sun in Zac's chest almost exploded. An immense pull on Dao and Mental Energy almost shattered Zac's Evolutionary Soul Core, but Zac gave no heed to cost or damage as he provided what Haro needed.

The World Ring on Zac's finger wasn't designed to endure a rampaging Heavenrender Vine or the drain from its blinding growth. A scream of intense danger forced Zac awake from his rage-addled state, and he hurriedly ripped off his left ring finger and threw it at Yselio while letting the shockwave carry him further away. The World Ring had already twisted on itself because of the immense spatial energies pouring from its cracks.

The ring exploded, unleashing a tempestuous spatial storm that swept the incoming sword away. Zac didn't see exactly what happened. One moment, there was only chaos. The next, a bowl-sized hole had been punched right through the chest of a delirious Yselio. The method had escaped Zac's

senses, but the source was clear. The attack came from the blood-red bulb in the storm's center that released such intense Killing Intent the air twisted around it.

It was Haro, having forced his way through the spatial seal in his desire to exact revenge. A full quarter of his body was withered, which was shocking considering how much life force a Peak-quality Plant King held. It was the price Haro had paid to unleash an unstoppable attack the moment it appeared. Even then, Haro wasn't satisfied. Vivi was still dead, while Yselio remained alive.

Zac could hear a primal scream as hundreds of vines lashed out at everything that moved. The sinister devils were grabbed and ripped apart by unyielding vines, but their bloodless deaths only seemed to make Haro angrier. Even Zac had two vines shoot toward his chest like bullets, though they stopped at the last minute to target something else.

The wounded corrupted beast became the first true casualty, its body reduced to meaty pulp. Yselio bore the brunt of Haro's anger. Half the vines were lashing and ripping at the Tobrial prince. Unfortunately, even with his mind overwhelmed by corrosive Killing Intent, he became an impregnable wall through reflexive, lightning-quick swordplay.

Such movements should have worsened his already lethal wounds, but a necklace had shattered, releasing a storm of Imperial Qi. It felt like Yselio was being propped up by billions of citizens ready to share his burdens. Zac's anger still burned red-hot, and he refused to let Yselio escape.

However, nothing happened when he tried to join Haro's onslaught. He was locked in place, with the Void fully seizing his body. The same was true for his Draugr half, who had been gorging on Void Crystals and high-quality treasures the moment he decided to go for broke.

Yselio's face was pallid. His long hair was in disarray, and his luxurious robes were drenched in blood from the terrifying wound in his chest. He leaked energy like a sieve because of a crack in his Cosmic Core, and his aura flickered precariously as ancient Killing Intent tore apart his soul piece by piece.

Yet his defensive swings grew increasingly refined, like he was gradually reclaiming control. Yselio soon emitted such a dangerous aura that even Haro snapped out of his mania and retreated. The blazing fury was still there, but

the Heavenrender Vine was a natural predator. He understood that he could only exact revenge if he survived.

"Flame...bearers..." Yselio slurred with a jarring voice as trails of blood and spittle ran down his mouth. "Dangerous... Indeed."

Zac struggled to stay awake, but his vision was already closing in. The tower was picked clean, and he could tell he had reached the quota. An exhausted smile appeared on Zac's face as he thought of Emily and Ra'Klid. At least they were safe. He could feel the immense torrents coursing through the tower and the aura of a true dimension peeking through the cracks. The weapon had been activated successfully, and the whole base of the fortress should have been deposited outside.

The rest was up to the Heavens. Zac couldn't move a finger and was forced to look on as Yselio ambled closer. His eyes shone like beacons from the depths of hell, and a twisted smile grew on his face as he lifted the terrifying sword to deliver a final blow.

A crack of a familiar origin silently opened behind Yselio. It had the same archaic air as skills imbued with Void Energy, but the breach was not made by Zac or his bloodline. Neither was it made from Void Energy. Four black blades emerged from Yselio's chest before he could react, and a pulse of unidentifiable energy scattered the Imperial Qi keeping him safe.

The attacker was a young woman wielding a claw in one hand and something resembling a detonator in the other. Floating behind her were two exquisite drones that emitted the same aura as hers. A Technocrat, one far more powerful than the others he'd encountered.

"You—!" Yselio roared, the rest of his words growing indistinct as the final tethers of reality were severed.

The boundary between self and Void disappeared as Zac's consciousness was dragged into the depths of his bloodline. Hundreds of vortices formed around him, forming an alien constellation. Yselio, held aloft by the claw on the newcomer's hand, could no longer hold onto his domain. The celestial court shattered, and they returned to the command center.

Something landed by Zac's side as the drones formed a sphere of blue sigils, enclosing the Technocrat and her prey. They were gone the next moment, teleporting through unknown means.

*'Hurry, hide!'* Zac urged with his last shred of consciousness, prompting the Heavenrender Vine to disappear into a spare Worldring on his hand.

Then, nothingness.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

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## Chapter 1157: Raindrops

The ship gently sailed atop the clouds that stretched across the horizon. Dusk was approaching, painting the horizon in orange and pink. Hidden formations kept most of the wind at bay, and the only clear sign of their great velocity were the gaps in the clouds that occasionally flashed by. They provided a welcome change to the monotone view by showcasing an untamed expanse untouched by human hands.

The Void Herald had called it the edge of the Thousand Beasts Ridge. It was a region full of opportunities, according to the other passengers. Immense Dragon Veins and blessed lands gave birth to endless treasures, and many had discovered ruins full of hidden knowledge and paths to hidden realms.

Despite the riches, few cultivators dared travel beyond the outer perimeter. Even Void Heralds feared the beasts who had made the mountain ranges their domain. There were also plenty of death traps formed naturally by the Heavens. As such, a region surpassing the Blue Spring Sect's domain by thousands of times remained unclaimed for millions of years.

Even the Hur'Vaz Empire, the home of their old sect, couldn't be compared to the Thousand Beasts Ridge's size. Eight factions bordered the region, each so vast their homeland wouldn't be considered more than a remote province.

Karz had always been acutely aware of his humble origins, but he'd still underestimated how high the peaks could go. Reading the incomplete and mostly made-up missives back in the sect had left him ignorant of the fact that

the Hur'Vaz Empire was just a small force on a satellite planet of a far-grander continent.

The only reason the Hur'Vaz Dynasty could claim themselves ruler of their little fiefdom was a tenuous connection to a real sect on the Grand Expanse Continent—The Serene Sea Sect they were currently headed for. It was the second-smallest of the factions bordering the Thousand Beasts Ridge, yet it represented a huge opportunity for himself and his 'young master.'

Another gap in the clouds whizzed by. Karz barely spared it a glance, having long lost his interest in observing the wilderness. His heart had been moved by the stories during their first weeks of travel, and he'd half-expected to encounter something amazing during their journey.

But how could there be unclaimed treasures on one of the public, regularly trafficked routes? The only break from the monotony was meeting the occasional vessel. Even that had grown boring. The vessels controlled by subsidiary factions kept a wide berth because of the overbearing sigil on the sides of their ship, and boarding the mercantile vessels usually left a sour taste in Karz's mouth.

The greatest commotion came when they encountered a young woman standing on the clouds with a spear in her hand. A Peak Void Herald, and such a young one, at that. There was apparently not a single one in the Serene Sea Sect, though there were rumors their elusive Sect Master might have reached that stage.

She must have come from an even loftier faction to wield such power at her age. The others believed she was out gaining experience. Luckily, her goal had been the ridge rather than their vessel. Their lofty guide hadn't even dared breathe as he provided direction, bowing deeply enough to touch the ground until she was out of sight.

There was always a greater mountain. It was comforting, in a way, since it meant he could keep climbing without causing any waves.

"Hey, what do you think about the old man's question?"

Karz turned over, finding Laondio sitting in his self-made chaos of messy notes and medicinal dregs. It was almost impressive how he managed to maintain the unkempt and dazed appearance of a scholar who had stayed too long within the archives during their journey.



"The greater purpose of cultivation?" Karz said as he began tidying up. "Who cares? Even if there is one, what does it have to do with me?"

"Junior Brother, you were a lot more likable when you pretended to be meek," Laondio laughed. "Then again, you wouldn't have accumulated the necessary resources without your feigned arrogance."

It was true. Collecting alchemical dregs and garbage eventually proved insufficient for his cultivation. As his affinities improved, they grew more discerning. But where would a rat born in a pile of refuse get their hands on expensive treasures? Completing Sect Tasks and trading with merit was just a way for the sect to secure cheap labor. You wouldn't amount to much even if you continuously risked your life. The good things were kept in the hands of the silver spoons while the have-nots fought over the scraps.

Karz found it more effective to orchestrate a series of enmities with the young masters of the sect, manufacturing justification to lift the treasures from bodies. It wasn't hard. Cultivators were the same everywhere, be it the Blue Spring Sect or the Grand Expanse Continent. Arrogant, bored, and trapped by convention. It was no wonder most factions were stagnant.

Some fools sought trouble simply because of his origin or unflattering nickname. Others could be made to lose all reason with a smile and a few words directed at the right girl. Playing with fire had almost cost Karz his life more than once, but it allowed him to gather enough materials to pursue power through other venues.

"There's nothing?" Laondio pressed.

"Not everyone is like you," Karz shrugged. "What's wrong with searching for power for power's sake?"

"Power for power's sake," Laondio sighed as he looked up at the stars. "Raindrops falling through the desolate, unknowing of their origin. The status quo isn't enough."

Karz had no idea what his companion was talking about, but he had long gotten used to the inscrutable comments and lofty ideals.

"You'll figure something out," Karz grunted as he got to his feet. "This won't work, though."



Karz was talking about the pile of notes he'd stacked and ordered. As always, he'd taken a peek to see if there was anything useful for his cultivation. This time, Laondio was researching a purification formation where you'd install a pillar in your backyard.

As for the medicinal dregs, they were already tucked away in his Cosmos Sack. They wouldn't help much, but it was better than nothing. Besides, Laondio didn't let propriety limit his experiments, and the Void Herald's inner world was seemingly bottomless when it came to Laondio's needs. These scraps were much better than what he used back then.

"Oh? You've finally read the books I lent you?" Laondio said with interest.

"Just enough to not get myself killed around you," Karz grunted. "This thing is much more effective than normal purification arrays, but that's because it's just pushing the taint away. Whoever dares put that thing in their courtyard would have their throats slit in the middle of the night. Unless it's the Sect Master, I guess."

Laondio looked taken aback at the conclusion. "Ah, you're right. I got too caught up in the theory, forgetting to consider the application. Perhaps if I strengthened it to cover the whole sect."

"That'll start a war," Karz laughed. "Even if it didn't, wouldn't you just surround your home with corruption, destroying your cultivation grounds and polluting the Earth? Maybe if you built one large enough to cover the Cosmos."

"Maybe you're onto something," Laondio grinned.

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"Whatever," Karz said. "I'm going to cultivate."

"Junior brother, I hope you one day can find a real answer. Even if it's one in conflict with my vision," Laondio said. "Until then, I'm happy to have you by my side."

"What if I'm just using you for power's sake?"

Laondio just laughed. "What if I'm just using you?"

Karz scoffed before emptying his glass and walking away. It was simple, really. If their ambitions ever put them against each other, they'd have to see who had the bigger fist. Of course, Karz refused to believe the cosmos wasn't big enough for the two of them. At least, he hoped it wasn't because he'd rather go against a whole sect than that outwardly harmless scholar.

It was clear that Laondio carried great secrets, secrets possibly surpassing his bloodline. Laondio maintained his lead no matter how much Karz improved his cultivation speed despite spending most of his time on various projects. There was also that uncanny way that reality bent to Laondio's will. Everything just worked out, like he was being swept forth by predestination.

Could a man really be that beloved by the Heavens?

Karz sometimes felt like he was living a dream, one where he wasn't even the protagonist. It was Laondio, who repeatedly overturned convention without anyone asking why and how. How could he invent pill formulas that awed even the Serene Sea Sect with their ancient history? Why did his detractors disappear one after another? How could he see through almost any item, method, or technique?

It seemed as though only Karz could see these discrepancies while the rest of the world just went with the flow. And Laondio didn't even seem to care about his bubble of immutability being exposed. If anything, he seemed happy to have a confidant, though it was a topic they never broached. Just like they never discussed why Karz's Heavenly Root had improved by two grades between his admission to the Blue Spring Sect and their visit to the Hur'Vaz Academy.

The world was cold, and Laondio's warm treatment sometimes made Karz feel like a pig being raised for the slaughter. Still, it was undeniable that Laondio had been instrumental in his rise. He would have died a few times over if not for Laondio helping him from the shadows. And how many times had Laondio just so happened to mention he'd heard rumors of a promising treasure ground, or that he'd found some scribbles that invariably led Karz to treasures he needed to advance?

Even the rare opportunity to leave their homeworld for greater heights was largely thanks to Laondio. Karz's official strength wasn't enough to contend for a real slot when the Serene Emissary visited the Hur'Vaz Academy. The only way he'd gain the Void Herald's attention was if he exposed some of his bloodline. Follow current novels on [NovelFire.net](http://NovelFire.net)

Karz knew he'd reached an impasse and had seriously considered taking the risk. Laondio effortlessly side-stepped the issue by passing a special trial, directly becoming the Sect Master's direct disciple. From there, he'd appointed Karz as his Sword Attendant, allowing him to tag along to the Grand Expanse Continent.

The role didn't come with any benefits, but what did that matter? He could make his own fortune so long as he had the right stage. The same held for Laondio's intentions. The garbage piles atop the incineration platforms would always be part of him, reminding him that one couldn't be picky where the food came from. What mattered was that it'd let you survive and fight another day.

It was a fool's dream to hope for any semblance of control. Civilization and the rule of law were made from thin, brittle lacquer. The slightest shock to the system would turn gentlemen into beasts and sages into devils. He'd keep going, keep surviving, until the day he was the king of the jungle. At that point, he could consider matters like the 'greater purpose of cultivation.'

Karz sealed his room before taking out the wooden gourd he'd bought for a pittance the other day. He wondered what the trader would think if he knew the old thing hid a natal seed bursting with Nature's Dao. It had eluded even the appraiser's discerning gaze, but nothing could escape the limitless hunger of his blood.

Green wisps were slowly extracted, each providing greater benefits than the circle of medicinal dregs he drew around himself. It took only two hours for his body to reach satiety. He'd ideally continue with a different element, but Karz was running woefully short of fuel despite his best efforts to supplement his reserves along the way. He occasionally struck gold, but few merchants would sell wares of unknown providence and value.

He turned his gaze inward, finding the nine sigils silently floating within the mysterious mist. Most were ethereal, barely casting a shadow. Only one stood out from the others, a five-colored rune resembling a lotus flower. It was the first sigil to form after he reached Golden Core, and the only to undergo an evolution in the thirty years since.

It wasn't a coincidence. The Blue Spring Sect's most famous arts were the Tidal Resurgence Mantra and the Steelstar Compendium. As such, most treasures that entered their gates contained the spirit of the Grand Materia.

Adding the alchemical flames left inside wooden alchemical dregs, and you had four out of the five elements.

The only one that came close was Nature's Sigil. Not because of the gourd, but because it was an inescapable part of medicinal herbs.

Karz observed the sigils a few minutes before summoning the strongest. A surge of searing heat spread through his body as patches of skin reddened. A ferocious aura joined the searing heat, and dark patterns resembling scales gave texture to the angry red. Karz glanced into a mirror, seeing the unique pattern on his forehead.

It was a mix of the two sigils forming something beyond the sum of its parts. It was only one of a vast number of possible combinations, though the one he most often used when facing danger. Part of it was because the manuals he cultivated meshed well with his transformation. However, it was mostly a natural consequence of Nature and Grand Materia being the strongest sigils in his collection.

He could maintain this state for ten minutes if needed, but Karz wasn't planning on working on his control today. A third sigil was called, and white markings appeared upon the scale-like formations as the patterns grew more orderly. Karz felt his body move toward a state of equilibrium where his will aligned with the Era.

The transformation only got halfway before disorder appeared among the scales. A bulbous growth appeared on his arm, and Karz quickly retracted his will from the runes. A small pop painted the nearby wall with blood and pus. Soon after, Karz's skin was back to normal, and the rune on his forehead had retreated into his mind.

Karz shook his head and spread ointment on his wound before taking out his worn-out notebook. He drew the final state of the rune with pinpoint precision, along with the resulting fault line on his arm. Finally, Karz jotted down his thoughts and new theories. Altogether, they only made up a few lines, far from the pages of insights he gleefully scribbled in the beginning.

Progress with his third integration was woefully slow, but there was no point in getting impatient. They'd reach their destination in a few months, where resources and knowledge overflowed. He'd absorb it all, taking him closer to his goal. He might even manage to form a few new seals, depending on what resources he could get his hands on.

During one of his lectures, the Void Herald had explained that the Heavens were split into Seventeen Kingdoms, and Karz suspected each sigil represented one. The Kingdom of Order stood at its center. And while it wasn't necessarily the strongest, it acted as the lynchpin of the Heavens. That was why Karz staunchly tried to integrate the corresponding sigil into all his experiments, despite it being his least-condensed rune.

He could already see the road leading to the very end. The day he reached seventeen integrations to form the Ultimate Truth, he'd truly become limitless and break the shackles of mortality and fate. Until then, he was happy being just Karz, the humble sword attendant none would spare a second thought.

The experiment ended early, leaving him with most of the energy in his Heavenly Reservoir intact. His head throbbed after forcing the third integration, yet he still took out a bundle of cheap herbs. Karz drew upon the runes again, though this time only the rune of the Grand Materia. And instead of evolving his body, he poured meaning into the dry stalks.

The process was tedious and time-consuming but necessary for his goals. Thirty infusions could turn a worthless stalk into a 500-year-old herb, while one hundred infusions birthed a true millennial herb. He'd been forced to sell a few to the traveling merchants they encountered, and those blackhearted profiteers took advantage of their remote location to rob him blind.

Most were stowed away. They could be sold for at least ten times the price when they arrived, and would set him up without relying on Laondio or anyone else. Ultimately, cultivation was a solitary path where you were locked in an eternal struggle against fate and the Heavens. You were bound to be disappointed if you put your trust in someone else.

Karz eventually reached his limits, with his Heavenly Reservoir as dry as a desert. One millennial herb with a fiery aura and a 500-year stalk with a steely sheen was added to the pile. Karz got to his feet and took an unsteady step toward the crude gathering formation in the inner chamber. It would take a few days to recover and replenish his reserves.

It was the Heavenly Cycle, an equal exchange where he benefitted without adding to the innate sin of cultivation. The Heavens themselves were assisting him on his road to the peak. He sat down on the mat, hearing a few haunting notes from the deck above. Laondio had taken out his self-invented instrument again.

Karz enjoyed the unfamiliar melody for a few minutes, feeling it resonated with something deeper.

"Why does it matter if the raindrop doesn't know its origin?" Karz muttered as he sealed his ears. "What matters is whether it can grow into a boundless ocean."

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

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## Chapter 1158: Truth and Empire

"We survived?" Bubbur muttered with disbelief when the escape pod's screams from having its hull twisted and rent calmed down to a cautionary susurrus.

The vessel seemed just as surprised to have survived the journey through that chaos, and the atmosphere was suddenly sucked out of a breach. Emily quickly grabbed Galau and another soldier before the whole thing collapsed, and they were spat out into the boundless expanse of outer space.

She had seen which way the wind blew and had already put on her spacefaring kit. Two talismans activated, forming layered defensive shields that allowed them to be swept away on the spatial winds, adding more distance from the tower. The moment Emily thought it safe, she took out a pod of her own and dragged the two inside.

Wayward soldiers were picked up in quick order, but Emily refused to steer her skipper away from the tower. She was waiting, her attention fully on the screens displaying the outsides.

A two-hundred-meter-long stretch of ancient stone silently floated behind them—the upper section of the Sixth Centurion Lighthouse. The rest of the tower or the huge scarred platform Zac described were nowhere to be seen. Neither were there any hints of Zac. Her heart was gripped with anxiety, wondering if something had gone wrong.

Thankfully, it was impossible to mistake the tower section for a piece of rubble separated from the rest of the structure. There were no hints of damage, apart from the severed section still reeking of ancient Killing Intent. Neither were there any signs of the spatial storm they'd narrowly passed through. Instead, the tower was surrounded by a spiral of gently flowing lights.

New notes of spatial splendor were continuously appearing from a radiant haze at the tower's bottom end. Emily could barely discern a foreign sky and another section of the tower within—a different dimension. The lights traveled along the structure to a similar gate on the other end, and it seemed as though the tower was being transformed before their very eyes.

"He won't appear here," Galau said with a somber expression. "The twisted space is unraveling, stretching space across millions of miles and multiple dimensions. Every second will take him further and further away."

"Is that why we all had to cram into one pod?" Emily said, her frazzled emotions amplified by the memory of passing through the storm while packed like sardines.

"You saw the state of the third one," Average shrugged. "Doubt it'd have survived."

"That token he used..." Galau hesitated. "I saw markings of the Starfall Lighthouse and that of my—"

"Forget about that thing," Emily snapped as she levied a murderous look on the group of castaways. "In fact, don't mention anything about the seals on the outside until you're back with your people. Probably not even then."

"Why not? Just what are those things?" Average asked with a frown.

Emily shot a hesitant glance at the shimmering tower before taking a steadying breath. The situation had already reached this point. She couldn't help Zac against that smooth-faced monster, but she could at least make sure these meatheads wouldn't get him in trouble after he emerged. So, Emily briefly explained the situation with the trial and how it had impacted the war.

"You're saying sealbearers have become a commodity, and the Peak Family wouldn't be able to protect me even if they wanted," Galau sighed. "Sounds like another prison is waiting outside. Or worse, we'll become pawns used to reveal the trial's hidden dangers."



Emily pursed her lips as she looked at the crestfallen merchant. Or rather, Array Master, a skill that they sorely lacked back home without Kenzie around. Someone who could fix all the defective weapons she'd stockpiled, who could provide insights into her Axe Array. He didn't even look half-bad.

And while the rest of these people looked a bit dumb, they all had incredibly stable auras and great survival instincts. They were even better than the talents they'd snagged in the Red Sector. Instead of worrying about things she couldn't control, maybe she should do some recruiting.

"Hey, Shartermaster, which seal did you get?" Emily asked as she leaned closer with big eyes. "Do you need a place to stay?"

"I thought we weren't supposed to talk about it?" Galau countered, his shifty eyes rife with distrust. "And what do you mean—"

"Ah, little queen, I'm a Sealbearer of the Tethered Court," Bubbur quickly interjected as he squeezed over. "Not bad, right? So how about—"

"What? You're a sealbearer?" Emily said with shock before her eyes thinned with suspicion. "Wait. You're less than a hundred years old?"

"Only a kid just shy of 90," Bubbur grinned. "I don't know? We just end up looking like this after entering the Muscle Brigade."

"Were they just handing out seals to anyone in there?" Emily muttered while flicking an arc of lightning at the overly enthusiastic barbarian. "Come on, what about you, handsome?"

Galau rolled his eyes but relented. "I guess Bubbur would rat me out anyway. I'm a Threadwinder of the Daedalian Court."

"Daedalian?" Emily said, her eyes gleaming.

Could this be the answer to the riddle that had plagued Zac for over a decade? When he first got the quest to collect Outer Court Cycles, progress was already 4/6. At that time, the only known sealbearer by his side was Ogras, which left them incredibly confused.

As time passed, they had solved parts of the mystery. She was obviously one of the four, having already gotten her first piece of the Radiant Court. But to



this day, the numbers failed to add up. The cycle was complete while lacking a Threadwinder. Was it Galau all along?

"Why not go with them? We know you weren't planning to return to the army, anyway. You've even mentioned hiding out with the boss on his System-shrouded planet," Average grinned, further cementing Emily's theory.

Someone would only be included in their cycle if they felt they belonged to their side. The only other Threadwinders Zac knew were his undead girlfriend and some guy in the Radiant Temple, but they were already spoken for by their respective factions.

"You too, Bubbur. I need to go back to my family, but there's no reason you should become a pawn to the outsiders."

"We can protect you," Emily eagerly nodded at Galau. "Uh, you too, Bubbur."

"Protect me? I haven't forgotten why Zac came to the Tower of Eternity," Galau said with a roll of his eyes. "Or how many people he ended up offending instead of finding a backer for his newly integrated planet. And there's no way such a troublemaker has kept a low profile while we were trapped. Can you even protect yourself?"

"We're a young faction, but we're doing alright," Emily grinned as she took out a couple of identity tokens, including those of the Allbright Empire and the Dravorak Dynasty. "Things have changed since you guys met in the Tower of Eternity. Teacher is doing pretty well for himself these days. Our faction has diplomatic relationships with half the top factions of the sector.

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"That old Redeemer guy hasn't dared show his face for years, and the elders of the Heliophos Clan have already sent us a bunch of apology gifts. We're rich as all hell, our armies are the best decked-out in the sector, and we have multiple people on the war contribution ladders."

"How in the..." Galau muttered as he looked at the tokens with suspicion.

Bubbur wasn't as hard a sale. "I'm willing!"

Emily nodded with satisfaction. Her pitch was already a well-oiled machine after years of practice. Unfortunately, her real target wasn't as easily convinced.

"This smells like a sales trick. Is anything you said true? About you, about the seals."

"It's all true, you paranoid bastard," Emily swore. "You'll find out the truth as soon as you return, anyway. The bounties are public. You're literally a walking commodity right now."

"Then what are you guys relying on?" Galau countered. "Have you already sold yourself to the outsiders? Or do you have some valuable resources? Because there's no way a little D-grade faction will garner much attention from the established factions, no matter how impressive your teacher is."

Emily was surprised at how quickly Galau figured it out, which only made her want him more. Zac had raised a faction with fine warriors and standout elites. But she had to admit, most people at the top were good at fighting and nothing else. Just look at their sealbearers. Zac's meathead camp so overwhelmingly outnumbered the 'coalition for reason' that her fellow Lightbringer, Carl Elrod, had a mental breakdown and began calling himself a janitor.

"A little bit of both. We have a working agreement with the Undead Empire, but we're more like independent contractors. It was teacher who ended the eternal war and brought the Kavriel Province to Zecia's side. Without his contribution, the war would have looked a lot different right now. Oh, teacher also happens to own the best Cosmic Vessel Shipyard in the sector. Our wares have proven pretty effective on the battlefield."

"As expected of the man who summoned the Stele of Conflict," Galau sighed as he glanced at the soldiers around him. "It's not impossible for me to join you. However, I have a few demands."

"What's that?"

"I accumulated a lot of knowledge in there. Schematics, blueprints, weaponry. I need you to find a way to disseminate those methods. I don't care about money. I just want the inventions I've carried for years to kill as many invaders as possible. My comrades gave up everything everything to get me and my knowledge this far. I want them to matter. I want their sacrifice to matter."

A subdued silence filled the room as eight sets of eyes focused on Emily. She almost felt she could see the outlines of their fellow brigadiers standing behind them and the unbreakable determination in their eyes.

"I promise," Emily solemnly nodded. "If we can make them, we'll sell them at cost. If we can't, we'll find the right partners so that the blueprints won't reach the Kan'Tanu."

Any further discussion was interrupted by a beeping signal. Emily swore at the console and quickly took out a change of clothes and forged identities for Bubbur and Galau.

"Remember! In case we don't get killed in the next minute, you two are soldiers of the Acheron Company of the Atwood Empire!" Emily urged before glaring at the others. "And not a word from you guys!"

Emily solemnly gazed at the screen as a monstrous dreadnought, unlike any Cosmic Vessel she'd ever seen, tore through space, appearing just a few dozen miles from their position. It was impossible to tell whether it belonged to the Alliance, the Kan'Tanu, or some outsiders. The only thing she knew for certain was that it was ancient and that it held the power to take on a whole armada.

Escaping was out of the question. The earlier warning was a two-hit combo of space being sealed and a spatial breach. Thank god the tower had already shifted out of their dimension as it continued its activation. Neither did the others seem to recognize it. The Muscle Brigade mutely stared at the incoming vessel, their eyes as wide as saucers.

"Holy crap."

-----

The cloaked men were unmoving like statues as Yrin gazed at the Royal Orb in his hand. They were witnesses of the Seventh Edge, their role just to observe. For now. The cardinal stood by Yrin's side, eyes half-closed as he sensed the changes in the Imperial Qi. Suddenly, his eyes shot open as pupils and sclera were replaced by radiant purple.

"There has been a shift in the order," an ancient voice came from the young clergyman's throat.

It was a necessary step, even if Yrin didn't require any outside input to confirm the changes. He could feel how the clouds of Purple Qi darkened before being forcibly stabilized by the accumulated providence of the Tobrial Dynasty. Yrin briefly closed his eyes before turning to Ylvin. The Monarch looked back with a complex gaze, understanding what must be done.

"Call him home."

There was neither joy nor sorrow upon learning that his younger brother had failed. Not even the fact that his Imperial Qi had been forcibly dispersed, which could only mean regicide, created a ripple in his heart. It was part of the natural order and the cycle of any dynasty. Rulers came and went, becoming a link in an ever-growing chain. Hopefully, they would leave behind something greater than what they inherited. Even if not, that was just another hurdle to overcome.

Empires had their ebb and flow, and succession was a chance to turn fate around.

"Yes, Your Highness," Ylvin sighed before activating the crucible.

A flood of Imperial Qi poured out of the Royal Orb and entered the ancient stele, and Yrin added a drop of his blood. A gate through time and space, connected through lineage, formed. A bedraggled figure surrounded by immensely fell air appeared before the crucible, and it took a moment for Yrin to connect the figure with his mercurial brother.

Yrin thoughtfully looked at his brother's wounds, trying to envision the battle that brought him to this state. It wasn't easy. The large hole in his torso held lingering hints of plant-based lifeforce, while his Soul Aperture was flooded with ancient Killing Intent. Finally, there were multiple traces of Technocrat presence, including something drilled into his skull.

Ylvin growled with anger and forcibly dispersed the sinister energies with a wave of his hands before reducing the device to ash with a burst of light. It made Yselio's eyes flicker open, and they soon focused on Yrin.

"Ah, so you're the one they picked, brother," Yselio wheezed as a bloody smile appeared on his face.

"You knew?" Yrin said before slightly shaking his head. "Of course you did."

"Competition is the Heavenly Path, and this mission can't be shouldered by me alone," Yselio said as he tried to sit up, only to fail and fall back down.

His red eyes turned to the band of stars above like he was searching for secrets hidden within their constellation. Or perhaps he simply didn't have the heart to look at those present after being discarded by fate. A rough laugh more resembling a groan escaped Yselio's throat, and small red bubbles formed around his mouth.

"You ousted one outside party and weakened two more. And despite your failure inside the fortress, we managed to seize four more seals on the outside," Yrin calmly said. "I will report your achievements in hopes that our Royal Father will recover you when this chapter is concluded."

"You always were a straight arrow," Yselio smiled, his eyes unmoving. "I hope my small contribution has smoothened the road ahead."The source of this content is N(o)veI(F)ire.net

"Your wounds hold the taint of the Selvari," Yrin said. "Are they responsible for your current state?"

"The Selvari? You could say that. The price of curiosity is steep," Yselio muttered, his gaze growing distant as he finally turned back to Yrin. "My dear brother, between truth and Empire, what's most important?"

Yselio's cultivation was rapidly dispersing while the ancient Killing Intent consumed his soul. Despite that, a sense of unease shook the normally impermeable fortress of Yrin's heart. Who better knew how dangerous Yselio was than his siblings?

"Empire is truth."

A streak of unstoppable swordlight split Yselio in two. Dao of Technology and Killing Intent were crushed by imperial might, leaving only Yrin's intent and Imperial Qi behind. Yrin sheathed his blade and lightly tapped the air to redirect the incoming attack.

"You heartless bastard, what are you doing?" Ylvin glowered. "Despite his failure, Yselio should have been given his rites."

"The trajectory has changed, and I have my instructions," Yrin said as he covered the bisected corpse. "My brother has always been capricious, and I couldn't let him do anything that might harm our efforts."

"I'm sure it has nothing to do with the opportunity," Ylvin snorted as he pointedly looked at the glowing light pouring from Yselio's wounds.

A moment later, a mysterious rune rose from his chest, prompting the Imperial Qi to form a swirl of fate and future.

"The Seventh Edge greets Lord Vindicator," the observers intoned, and Yrin stepped forward.

The swirling Qi welcomed his approach, though Yrin frowned upon feeling a slight disturbance within. He wanted to destroy it and the seal before they could taint the dynasty's providence. But he couldn't. He'd been chosen, so he would bring the Ultom Courts back to the Seventh Heaven, destroying all obstacles in his path.

He touched the rune, and the world turned dark.

"So, how is it?" Ylvin asked when Yrin emerged from the dissipating haze. "I hear those things contain amazing truths for the fated."

Yrin glanced at the empty husk bereft of soul and future and shook his head before turning to the sky.

"Truth..." he muttered, a small smile tugging at his lips.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

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## Chapter [BOOK 13 START]: The Path Forward

Zac's body was absolutely wrung dry after enduring the tribulation, yet he felt like a million bucks as he dragged himself toward the Nexus Node. He only

briefly stopped, looking hesitantly at his core. It had shrunk to two-thirds of its original size, emitting a condensed aura of power. However, it was also covered in small cracks, and it still released the occasional burst of unstable energy.

The insides of the Duplicity Core were the only spot that hadn't been drained by his Hidden Node and the Duplicity Core, and his core had just finished rooting it all out. Zac knew picking a class with a damaged core wasn't an issue, but should he wait a bit longer? It would give him some time to recover.

No, that wasn't an option. A deep rumble shifted his insides as yet another mountain crumbled in the distance. The Duplicity Core was insatiable, but Zac wasn't sure how much it could take. It had stopped its transformation while waiting for him to pick a class, but what if he delayed too long? The Technocrat invention had already provided enough surprises. He didn't want to wait to find out if some fail-safes were installed to avoid overloading the Duplicity Core with energy.

Better he pick now before his mother somehow picked for him.

The Nexus Node was different from the one he had back home. For one, it was only the size of a football, making it feel like a portable version. The dense golden scripts across its surface proved it was anything but simple, though. Between the runes and the stable aura it emitted, Zac even suspected it was far superior to the normal ones he'd encountered thus far.

This was the moment he'd been eagerly expecting, and his heart beat with anticipation as he placed his hand on the smooth surface. This was the last step. Having already endured the tribulation of the Boundless Heaven, the System wouldn't target him with another trial of its own. Only cultivators within Heaven's Path would have to deal with the tests he'd endured when entering E-grade.

Zac had originally been disappointed by that fact. Entering Hegemony would simultaneously attack you with all three types of tribulations, but so what? All aspects of his cultivation were beyond ordinary, be it his body, soul, or heart. Conversely, the experience had uncovered some sealed memories of his past. This time, he wouldn't get such an opportunity. Now, Zac was only relieved. The process and tribulation had left him in a far worse state than he'd expected. He just wanted to get things over with now so that he could rest.

There was actually a small risk you wouldn't have any options waiting for you if the System didn't deem you worthy. But that was quite rare and generally reserved for those who had cheated their way into Hegemony, completely relying on pills or treasures. If you managed to form a core based on your Daos, you'd generally have at least one class waiting for you.

Zac felt a pulse enter his body, and it was suddenly like the Duplicity Core had entered a Quantum State as it hid from the presence. Zac could feel the Nexus Node investigate his pathways and core, and a screen soon appeared.

### **Core Formation Successful**

**Design: 87% unique.**

**Imperfections: Low (10-100).**

**Evaluation: Middle Quality, S-grade Energy Capacity, S-grade Potential, S-grade level of Innovation.**

Zac hadn't expected to get a report card, but he was flush with pride at the evaluation. Besides the middle quality, which Zac had already known about, every evaluation was top-notch. Capacity and potential were the most important ones. The former meant he'd be able to draw far more power from his core than normal Hegemons, and the latter undoubtedly meant potential for upgrades.

These two being valued at S-level meant there were absolutely no problems taking his core all the way to Monarchy. Zac was the least surprised over the S-grade Innovation evaluation. His core was unique across the Multiverse. If his core didn't warrant S-grade, none did. However, Zac felt that particular evaluation was more for the System than himself.

The line reminded Zac of his time in the Technocrat Research Base, where getting the Pathstrider-title marked him for further training. S-grade Innovation felt like being branded an excellent experimental subject, which probably meant the System would throw more trouble your way to nurture you. Then again, that wasn't anything new, so Zac didn't mind too much.

The System seemed to be tabulating the results before showing his class options. Each second felt like an eternity, but Zac breathed in relief when the screen finally updated. It was official; he wasn't one of the unlucky few. Zac hadn't been worried his Daos or accomplishments would be insufficient, but



rather that his odd core would make it difficult for the System to generate suitable classes.

He'd been tormenting himself for nothing. There was not one, but three choices available to him.

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### **Base Attributes Per Level:**

Epic: 100 / 150 / 200.

Arcane: 115 / 170 / 225.

### **[Option 1]**

**Name:** [D-Epic] Arcadia's Champion.

**Fixed Attributes:** Strength +300 / 450 / 600, Vitality: +150 / 225 / 300.

**Free Attributes:** +100 / 150 / 200.

*Even Paradise needs a champion, an unrelenting storm of violence.*

**Name:** [D-Epic] Desolation's Warden.

**Fixed Attributes:** Strength +250 / 375 / 500, Endurance +150 / 225 / 300, Wisdom +75 / 100 / 150.

**Free Attributes:** +75 / 125 / 150.

*Bind them to your calamity. Pave your path with blood and bones. Emerge stronger.*

### **[Option 2]**

**Name:** [D-Epic] Primeval Edge.

**Fixed Attributes:** Strength +250 / 375 / 500, Dexterity +75 / 100 / 150, Vitality +200 / 300 / 400.

**Free Attributes:** +50 / 75 / 100.

*As Life was born, so was struggle. Become the primeval blade, reborn through battle.*

**Name:** [D-Epic] Predestination's Judge.

**Fixed Attributes:** Strength +275 / 400 / 550, Dexterity +50 / 75 / 100, Endurance +200 / 300 / 400.

**Free Attributes:** +50 / 75 / 100.

*As Death was born, so was struggle. Become the judge's blade, the cessation of all.*

### [Option 3]

**Name:** [D-Arcane] Evolutionary Precursor

**Fixed Attributes:** Strength +300 / 450 / 600, Dexterity +100 / 150 / 200, Vitality +150 / 225 / 300

**Free Attributes:** +100 / 150 / 200

*Progress through struggle, future seized, not given.*

**Name:** [D-Arcane] Inexorable Apostle

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**Fixed Attributes:** Strength +325 / 475 / 650, Dexterity +75 / 125 / 150, Endurance +150 / 225 / 300.

**Free Attributes:** 100 / 150 / 200

*Explosive stillness, fate become nourishment to your ascent.*

-----

The vortices around him were a reminder his time was limited, but Zac still went over his options word by word. There were not many surprises after having spent years inside the Perennial Vastness—the gaps in his knowledge that came with being a frontier cultivator had been filled long ago. The only point of interest in the basic information was how the data was presented.

Like with the nodes, his Base Attribute gain had been separated from the class options. Normally, the text wasn't presented this way, and Zac guessed it resulted from the System adjusting to his unique situation. The biggest takeaway was that he'd unlikely get two sets of base attributes, just like how he only got attributes for opening nodes once.

Neither was Zac sure how it'd work in practice. There was no clear event per level, like when nodes were opened. His core would stay the same until it was time to upgrade it to the Middle stage. Each level would just let him tap into a bit more of its power. Cultivators would slowly refine their cores when practicing their manuals, but that only affected their quality.

Would the Base Attributes be awarded when one of his sides gained a level, or did both sides need to reach that step? Or was it perhaps impossible for him to level only one side at a time, considering his Quantum Core relied on a state of balance? Zac guessed he'd find out soon enough after gaining his first levels. Gaining levels with pills was far more inefficient in the D-grade, but he should be able to get a couple after his core stabilized.

Not getting two sets of Base Attributes was a disappointment, but in no way a surprise. After all, he only had the one core, even if it was unique. He'd held onto a lingering hope his Quantum Core's dual states would provide dual bonuses, but it looked like it wasn't meant to be. Zac didn't feel he was losing out. If anything, his situation could be considered better in the D-grade.

A normal Epic E-grade cultivator gained 25 base attributes, 10 free points, and around 70 class attributes per level at the late stage, for a grand total of 230 raw attributes per level. Looking at the numbers, an early Hegemon gained almost five times that. From there, every stage would increase the gain by 50%, meaning a Late Hegemon gained double the attributes an early Hegemon did.

In other words, a Hegemon's attribute advantage against E-grade cultivators wasn't as pronounced as an E-grade cultivator's advantage over an F-grade cultivator. Neither did attributes scale as well through Hegemony, only doubling compared to the E-grade's tripling. It was the same with Earthly Daos, meaning the attribute difference wasn't as noticeable between the ranks.

In this case, Zac's advantage came from the distribution of attributes. Going through the E-grade was to prepare your body for cultivation and reform it with Cosmic Energy. As such, it provided large comprehensive improvement to

every aspect of your body with every node opened. In practice, this translated to two-thirds of the attributes being allocated when opening a node.

Only 33% of your attributes came from leveling your classes in the E-grade. This changed as you became a Hegemon. By this point, you'd stepped onto your path, or at least found a style suited to you. Hegemony leaned into your specialization, where you focused more on useful attributes while giving up on those who brought fewer benefits.

It was like Zac with his Intelligence and, to a lesser degree, Wisdom. He had over 4,000 Intelligence already, far more than even the greatest F-grade mages. But that barely helped him at all; it was essentially a dead attribute for him. The same was becoming increasingly true for his Wisdom. The strength of his soul and defenses against mental attacks mostly came from his **[Nine Reincarnations Manual]** rather than his attribute amplification.

The same held true for all cultivators. By the time you reached Hegemony, you were expected to shore up your weaknesses by relying on your strengths. Like Billy, who gained a skill to transform his Strength into explosive speed, making up for his lacking Dexterity. Similarly, you could use your Cosmic Core to power defensive treasures to protect your body and soul.

Focusing your attention on where it could be leveraged the most was more efficient. As such, half of your attributes would come from your class choice. For Zac, with his two classes, it meant a greater attribute superiority. Part of the advantage would be countered by D-grade Cultivation Manuals providing significantly stronger amplification, but it would still be noticeable.

Did that mean his advantage against the competition would only grow as he passed through the ranks? Both yes and no.

By raw numbers, Zac would be comparatively stronger the further he stepped through Hegemony. However, attributes weren't the only thing that mattered, and not just because of advantages like his techniques. There were only three true bottlenecks in the D-grade, but each transformed your Cosmic Core. A Middle-stage core would hold roughly five times the energy of an Early-stage one, and the same was true further down the road.

In other words, a Peak Hegemon wielded over 100 times the Cosmic Energy as an Early Hegemon. If you had no way to leverage this and turn your vast sea of energy into strength, then your advantage wouldn't be that big. But through Skills, War Regalia, and various unique means, you could absolutely

dominate the lower-stage Hegemons even if your attributes weren't that much higher.

That was an important distinction between Hegemony and the lower grades. Skills and equipment were linked to your core. You normally needed a Middle-stage Cosmic Core to power a Middle-proficiency skill, and the same was true for War Regalia. In return, these skills and tools would channel far more energy, which meant greater offensive and defensive power.

Against Hegemons in Zecia, where most didn't have regalia or the ability to upgrade their skills, Zac was confident in dealing with almost anyone by the time he entered Middle Hegemony. Against well-trained and well-equipped Hegemons from the Multiverse Heartlands? That was another story altogether. The Multiverse was divided between the haves and have-nots, and Hegemony was no different.

Since the attribute distribution provided little new information, Zac focused more on his class choices. Only being presented with three options was a step down from his previous breakthrough when he got the full set of five. Of course, it made sense.

Back in the F-grade, he'd still been finding his way. His power came from a mottled assortment of opportunities that had yet to crystallize into a cohesive system, let alone a path. Today, his understanding of cultivation was leagues ahead, and he had already picked the direction he wanted to take. There was no confusion, no hesitation—only faith and determination.

What would be the point of the System offering a bunch of Classes that would diverge from his path? In reality, the screen presented Zac with a different choice; did he want to confirm his path, or did he want to keep his options open?

Confirming his path meant getting the Arcane Classes, which came with higher attributes and more advanced forms of nurturing. But it also meant his future would grow narrow. It would be almost impossible for him to change course like he had multiple times in the E-grade. He would instead enter the refinement stage of his cultivation, where he slowly removed imperfections while moving toward the peak of his path.

The Arcane Classes, Evolutionary Precursor and Inexorable Apostle, were clearly modeled after his stances, which were the truest expression of his path. The flavor text reflected his understanding of Life and Death, where Life

represented possibility and Death represented dominion. One broke the chains of fate, while the other seized control over fate.

The Epic Classes represented freedom. Who knew what the future held? Perhaps there would be something inside Ultom that completely threw his path on its head, making him strive for something even greater. It would mean a smaller boost of attributes, but that wasn't that big of a deal. He was already getting far more attributes than anyone else by having two classes.

The two sets of Epic options were quite straightforward. The first duo, Arcadia's Champion and Desolation's Warden, seemed to be straight upgrades of his current classes. They would add more of the same, their attribute distribution almost identical to Edge of Arcadia and Fetters of Desolation. Picking this choice would likely provide the smoothest transition, and he would be able to hit the ground running.

Primeval Edge and Predestination's Judge moved his classes toward his path without fully stepping onto it. Its attribute distribution better aligned with his Daos and the set of Arcane Classes. It was the best of both worlds, adapted to his style without locking him in like an Arcane class.

Three options, all with their own advantages, and none with any direct flaws like many of his options last time. No matter what he picked, he would be well equipped for the upcoming war and the trial inside the Left Imperial Palace. Yet for Zac, it wasn't a difficult choice—he'd decided the second he saw the Classes.

He was going with the Arcane Classes.

His path had become an indelible part of his very being. Zac would see this road to the end, and he felt the safety net of an Epic Class would distract rather than help him. So Zac only took 20 seconds to enter his Void Self-state, ensuring he wasn't acting hastily or out of greed. No, picking Evolutionary Precursor and Inexorable Apostle was the right path forward.

Whether it was long-term potential or access to the quick powerups needed for Ultom, Arcane was simply the best option. After all, Arcane wasn't the end of the road; it was just the starting point of the next one. There were even higher-class rarities above, but those required you to confirm your path first.

The latest you could do so was when you confirmed your Dao and became a Divine Monarch, but there were disadvantages to waiting that long. The longer

you delayed the switch, the longer you would be stuck in the lower tier of class rarities. Picking Arcane now meant he could upgrade the rarity when forming his inner world and once more when becoming a Divine Monarch.

Doing so was exceedingly difficult, and Arcane Classes were by far the most common rarity, even among Autarchs. But so what? Reaching the goal might be impossibly difficult, but since when had cultivation been easy? You had to dare grasp for the stars if you wanted a chance at rising above.

A surge of energy filled Zac's body as he provided the Nexus Node with his answer, this one provided by the cosmos itself rather than through the forceful extraction of the surrounding spirituality. He saw mysterious runes sink into the channels he'd arduously crafted while waves of change rippled through his pathways. Fractals expanded and grew more exquisite, where ten patterns became one hundred to accommodate greater energies and deeper Daos.

The transformation of his core and pathways were soon mirrored on the Duplicity Core, confirming Zac's suspicion it was waiting for his Class choice to finish the transformation. It formed a mysterious resonance with the evolving core, and Zac gasped as he finally sensed a weak connection to his Cosmic Core. It felt like a bottomless ocean of pure power, right there for the taking.

However, two discordant pulses threw Zac out of his marvelous state, and unbelievable pain suddenly wracked his body.

A storm of foreign energy had appeared in his chest, and Zac felt like he could hear the whirring clatter of millions of gears turning as his whole body seemed to phase in and out of reality. The System was still imprinting his core at full steam, but Zac barely noticed it as he desperately tried to understand what was happening. It wasn't difficult to find the culprit.

The Kayar-Elu was not yet done meddling with his breakthrough. The source of this content is novel Fire.net

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## Chapter 1159: Foreign Gods

Zac's consciousness loathed being pulled from the past to face the uncomfortable realities of the present. A powerful rocking rendered the resistance futile, and Zac was shocked wide awake. The confused state of overlapping lives was forced away by memories flooding back. Memories of the fight leading up to his breakthrough.

His body was still covered in wounds from Yselio's onslaught and drained of energy, but it was nothing compared to the pain he felt from the hollow sensation coming from **[Link of Demeter]**. Zac crammed a bunch of Soldier Pills into his mouth as he desperately channeled the skill, hoping he'd missed something in the heat of the moment. There was no response and no link to trigger.

Intense grief welled forth, one not solely of his own making. He followed the feeling to **[Adaptive Symbiosis]**, where he found a chaotic consciousness. The Heavenrender Vine seemed to sense his presence and extended a vine to wind around his left arm like he was looking for comfort. However, Haro suddenly recoiled like he'd been burned, and it almost looked like it had suffered frostbite. There was something wrong with his body.

The breakthrough was already finished, but he was still drawing on large amounts of Void Energy. Zac followed the feeling to his Soul Aperture, where he found the illusory image of a familiar mountain. The Void Mountain was back in the form of a new ability, though it was so faded Zac barely could discern its outline.

Zac didn't fret about the matter since he could feel Haro was on the verge of losing control and entering a deviation. He quickly roused his Void Heart to control the apparition, which prompted it to flicker out of existence. The drain stopped, and Zac quickly focused on the Heavenrender Vine.

"Hey, hey," Zac whispered as he caressed the startled vine while sending soothing thoughts into **[Adaptive Symbiosis]**. "It's okay. We're okay."

Haro gradually calmed down, though his aura was still unstable after the sudden breakthrough and using lifeforce. Zac infused his consciousness into the World ring to check his wounds, but a shocking scene threw those thoughts out the window. There were dozens of large withered vines and



petals strewn about, and the Heavenrender Vine dragged one after another into its maw.

"You're eating her?!" Zac said, aghast and enraged. "She was your—"

The words caught in his throat upon seeing a familiar flower growing on a newly formed vine. It was Vivi, or rather a flower from Vivi's species. Zac scanned the vine, confirming there was no separate spirituality within. It was only a transplant. Vivi's spirit had already dissipated from blocking Yselio's strike, and the only thing that could return her was a Supremacy crossing the river of time.

"You wanted to keep a piece of her?" Zac sighed. "Good."

Zac was answered by a brutal Killing Intent that almost overwhelmed Zac's defenses, and vines harder than steel wildly flailed about inside the World Ring. Haro couldn't communicate with words, but Zac could see a rough image of Yselio surrounded by a halo of hatred. The real person Haro wanted to consume.

"You're right," Zac said, his bloodthirst matching the Plant King's.

One after another, these imperials targeted him, full of self-righteousness and greed. Now, Vivi had paid the ultimate price to keep him safe. It didn't even matter that a large amount of Kill Energy confirmed Yselio's fate after being dragged away. This grudge wasn't over.

"That bastard is dead, but so what? They'll keep coming, and I'm not finished either. We'll have them all accompany Vivi in the afterlife."

Zac's words were resolute, but he was still shaken up over how close to death he'd just come. He thought he roughly understood what to expect after dealing with Valsa Planur and the deathsworn, but Yselio Tobrial was another league altogether. Yselio was almost unstoppable thanks to the Imperial Qi, and he had the personal strength to back it up. Zac had thrown everything but the kitchen sink at his enemy without landing a finishing blow, relying on his breakthrough and the tower to exhibit far greater lethality than his own.

Yselio blocked Oblivion and forced his way out of the Void. Not even flooding him with enough Killing Intent to kill ten lesser men had stopped his advance. Sure, the onslaught left the princeling grievously wounded, but Zac would still

be dead if not for the intervention of that masked Technocrat. That begged another question.

Why would she help him, a stranger, after he'd killed a dozen of her men? According to Yselio, Zac's actions had even let the imperials seize the advantage and 'deal with the Sindris Clan.' Even then, Zac was all but certain she'd moved to save him as much as to deal with Yselio. Was it because of the familiar archaic aura he'd felt from her? He'd always assumed it came from his Void Emperor Bloodline. Could it be related to his Selvari Heritage instead?

Another shake forced Zac to table the matter, and he turned his attention to the surroundings. He was still in the control center, sitting at the bottom of a small crater. The depression was nowhere the size of the bite he'd taken out of the Memorysteel Mountain, but Zac was surprised he'd managed to whittle it down at all. He knew just how durable the reinforced chamber was.

It could be attributed to the transformation of his surroundings. Thousands of gleaming spheres of spatial gravity looked like suspended raindrops. They were more stretched out than what Zac remembered, though that may have more to do with the tower than the spheres themselves. The command center seemed to have undergone a similar spatial expansion as the Technocrat Research Base, except it only expanded vertically.

The ceiling was three times farther than before, while the consoles had turned into trees. And it was still slowly expanding, which was a poignant reminder his time was limited. His breakthrough only seemed to have taken five minutes, far below Galau's estimate of half an hour. However, that was just an educated guess, and every second he wasted would make his escape more dangerous.

Zac shot to his feet and was surprised to find an unfamiliar item hidden beneath his legs. It was a simple Cosmos Sack without a mark of damage. A hazy memory surfaced of the Technocrat throwing something in his direction just before he blacked out. It was amazing that it had survived when the reinforced stone had not, but Zac had bigger fish to fry. The sack flew into a pocket as he leaped out of the crater.

Unsurprisingly, Yselio hadn't left any seal behind, even if Zac's guts told him the prince was another Flamebearer. If it were true, the seal was now in the Technocrats' hands. The missed opportunity didn't bother him much. He could still get his final piece through the System's quests, and part of him felt

unworthy of claiming Yselio's seal. Zac couldn't call it a victory despite the outcome.

Zac made a beeline for the exit. Surprisingly, the pile of materials that had been spat out when Yselio destroyed the vortex remained, and Zac threw them all into his Spatial Ring without missing a beat. However, he froze just as he was about to enter the emergency corridor, even if the door opened just fine.

The hesitation came from scanning the Technocrat's Cosmos Sack to ensure he didn't bring something dangerous onto the escape vessel. There were only two items inside; a hastily scribbled note with two sentences and an unfamiliar insignia with the same archaic aura. The emblem was curious since Zac didn't recognize the design, but it was the note that had stopped him in his tracks.

*'The Centurion Beacon is in the inner chamber. North, East, South-west, North-west, South, South-east, West, South-west, Center.'*

Zac surveyed the large bridge and realized a hidden door had opened opposite the entrance. Its presence clashed with the schematics he'd seen in the Tribulation Throne. A reinforced wall should have been there, which kept the command center separate from the project operations.

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He needed to make a decision. The shakes were growing worse, and more raindrops were appearing every moment. The incredibly durable materials could not fully isolate the raging energies gathered outside the tower. The escape pods were waiting on the other side of the corridor.

"Damnit!" Zac swore while pivoting, rushing toward the mysterious door.

Zac was playing with fire, but the Technocrat had thrown out the one bait he couldn't resist. He understood she might be using him to extract the beacon after she was forced to leave in a hurry. But so what? The beacon might be able to call forth a power surpassing even the Centurion Lighthouse. How could he possibly ignore it?

A circular room without doors waited on the other side, and Zac noted it wasn't affected by the changes the tower was undergoing. There were no gravity spheres or signs of spatial distortion. Was the room hidden inside a folded

space? It would explain how such a large chamber could appear between the two wings.

An ancient round table was placed in the room's center, lovingly engraved with intricate patterns. Zac stowed it without giving it a second look, his eyes frenziedly scanning every nook and cranny in search of the real prize. The room was empty apart from the one piece of furniture. There were no other pathways, and his Treasure Sense may as well have been broken.

Had he misunderstood the note, or was it a ruse? Zac couldn't wait much longer, so he took a last look around before heading back. Suddenly, his gaze stopped at the exquisite mosaic formerly hidden beneath the table. Zac's mind throbbed from the complex motif. At the surface, it looked like a map of an ancient kingdom. It had one central region and was surrounded by eight subsidiary provinces.

The map was arranged with excruciating detail, to the point Zac could almost hear the rustle of trees and feel the weight of the mighty mountains. There were also hundreds of ancient beasts, grand buildings, and mighty warriors added as decoration, each life-like enough that Zac wouldn't be surprised if they leaped out of the marble.

The arrangement was solid rock and without any energy, but there was more at play. He'd have to be blind if he didn't realize the map was only a façade hiding the schematic of an immensely complex array. He even felt like the arrangement exposed some profound truths of the Cosmos.

His first instinct was that the map depicted the Left Imperial Palace and its subsidiary courts, but his eyes widened when he spotted his seal's rune atop a provincial capital. From there, he soon discovered all nine outer courts fused with the surroundings throughout the province. His heart shuddered upon remembering Leyara's words back in the Void Star, how the Limitless Empire had raised Eight Pillars in the corners of reality.

Was this a map of the System?

"Directions," Zac muttered, realizing what was going on.

He aligned himself with the mosaic before infusing a wisp of Mental Energy in the first provincial capital, following the order on the note. Blindly following a stranger's instructions was risky, but Zac had no better solution. Since he only had one try, he might as well put his trust in that girl.

Nothing happened, so Zac took out the **[Court Cycle Token]** and repeated the process. The response was immediate. One after another, a province came alive, filling the room with scattered scenes hinting at ancient secrets.

With every added pillar, the illusions grew more incomplete, and Zac had to channel his Void Heart to keep going. Soon, only the mosaic was left dark, surrounded by a tapestry just as grand as what he'd seen inside the Tribulation Throne. Zac took a shuddering breath as he infused the Imperial Capital.

The room went dark as immense amounts of Faith Energy flooded the room. Zac inwardly panicked, but it all poured into the imperial capital, making it look like the whole Cosmos was fueling it with providence. Suddenly, a pillar of light shot from the mosaic, and Zac spotted two items floating within.

The first was a tome called **[Foreign Gods]**, and the other a compass made from unknown metal. Zac urgently stowed them before the room ran out of faith and rushed back to where he came from. Just as he was about to leave the folded space, Zac threw out the Cosmos Sack with note and insignia still inside.

The emblem could be a way for the Technocrat to contact him, and her intentions could be good for all he knew. However, it could also be a tracker so they could snatch the goods from his hands. He needed the token to extract the beacon, which possibly meant the Technocrat had been unable to get it herself. He couldn't take that risk, so her gift would have to stay behind.

Zac made a beeline for the escape room, and Zac breathed out in relief upon seeing that his outburst hadn't managed to reach the escape vessels. Two remained, which meant the others had squeezed into just one. Not only that, but it looked like Emily and Galau had left him the best ship.

Zac inwardly swore at their stubbornness as he closed the hatch behind him. Emily, especially, should understand how hard he was to kill and have taken the vessel for herself. Of course, Zac would do the most of their generosity. The escape pod was shaped like a small shuttle and didn't require any expertise to pilot. Emily even left a note beside a lever saying, 'Pull me!'

So why didn't it activate?

Zac repeatedly pulled the lever with increasing force and frustration. Had the array broken? Or did it realize the conditions outside were too dangerous to

open the hatch? Zac urgently opened the pod's hatch and threw out a fist-sized clump of metal. The chunk flew onto a manual override with the help of telekinesis, which immediately brought about the apocalypse. A shaky gate had opened, meant to let the vessel outside. But instead, a flood of chaotic energy poured into the room.

It crashed into the vessel, blowing its hatch wide open. The sudden shock almost threw Zac out the door, but he grabbed a handle and pulled himself inside. The ship groaned under the strain, and Zac worried it would buckle before it could even be launched. Out of better options, Zac drew upon his bloodline. The source of this content is [NOVEL\(F\)ir\(e\).NET](http://NOVEL(F)ir(e).NET)

An immense sphere of nothingness covered the whole ship, dousing it in silence. The gateway kept spewing more inside, but the brief respite was enough to pull the hatch shut and return to the pilot seat. He retracted **[Void Zone]**, simultaneously activating a soldered-on booster that bore Emily's mark. The ship shot forward like a rocket while Zac furiously cranked the lever like an old lawn mower.

The ancient console sputtered to life, and a gleaming barrier surrounded the ship just as it passed through the gate. A deadly yet beautiful storm waited on the other side. It resembled a hurricane formed by trillions of fireflies, except the motes of light contained shocking amounts of spatial energy.

The shielding proved woefully inadequate to fully isolate the intense spatial forces. Cracks spread across the hull and console, and bleeding gashes were forced on his body. Zac used what little energy he'd recovered by repeatedly activating defensive talismans. It helped, but not for long.

A piece of the hull was suddenly ripped away before Zac could activate another talisman, triggering the instant and total collapse of the escape pod. Zac found himself in the midst of the storm, and he knew he had to rely on his bloodline to survive. His energy was almost tapped, but he could feel an ocean's worth of Void Energy hiding in the depths.

The nullification sphere spread out, and thousands of fireflies suffocated. It confirmed **[Void Zone's]** range had increased to almost twenty meters and was noticeably stronger. The spatial forces were too powerful, and spatial fractures opened new wounds across Zac's body.

The expenditure was terrifying, and Zac feared he'd run out of juice before he made it through. He contracted the sphere, but it didn't help. At least not in the

way he intended. The expenditure remained the same, but Zac noticed the nullification grew more overbearing the smaller the sphere grew.

His lack of control only allowed him to decrease its size to five meters, but that was enough to lessen the pressure enough to figure out his next step. He wildly looked around for a path out until he sensed something familiar from his ring. It was actually Emily's rescue beacon going off again.

She'd made it through, and she was probably trying to help him like when he'd entered the tower. Zac tore through the storm using Void Energy and **[Skystriker]**, enduring the accumulating wounds across his body. Just when he thought he'd reached his limits, the pain dwindled.

The deadly beauty of the spatial storm had been replaced by oppressive darkness, but Zac almost cried with relief upon seeing the comforting emptiness of outer space. He kept going, heedlessly expending his dwindling stock of Void Energy.

While putting more distance between himself and the tower, Zac glanced back at where he came from. The tower was nowhere to be seen. Instead, he found himself looking at an ethereal streak of light that seemed to shift in and out of reality. Or rather, in and out between dimensions like a spatial needle pushing through the fabric of reality.

The beam was already longer than the circumference of New Earth, yet it kept expanding at a breakneck pace. Then, Zac's heart shuddered, and he urgently activated an escape talisman despite the spatial turbulence. It only held for a second before the teleportation failed. Zac would have been turned into meat cubes by the spatial collapse if he hadn't anticipated the situation and reactivated **[Void Zone]** at the last moment.

The spatial flux he appeared from was crushed by the Void when he reemerged a dozen miles away from his original position. Even then, his body was almost twisted in a knot when the pillar of light released a powerful pulse and disappeared. The **[Centurion Spear]** had entered the next stage of his journey, which would hopefully end in the middle of a Kan'Tanu base.

"Godspeed, you broken piece of junk," Zac muttered as he took out a rescue barge with shaky hands.



He was out. Now, he just needed to get back without being caught by cultists, outsiders, Technocrats, or any other opportunists who wouldn't mind taking him out for his fortune.

Easy enough, right?

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