

Defiance of the Fall

- Chapter 1202: Holy Son

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Whether guarding against outside threats or plots involving the whole Multiverse, Zac was in it now. Then again, was he ever out? How much was coincidence, and how much was design? Getting Ensolus from an unexpected Incursion just a few years into the integration. The war and the remnants rising from the depths of history. Awakenning the Ensolus Ruins with the Tribulation Throne, and now being given a title he didn't understand or want.

Step by step, he'd been led to this point. His so-called Void Road and its independence almost felt like a joke. And it wasn't over. There was no way that the flame the templars referred to wasn't the same one as his Flamebearer title for the Left Imperial Palace. The whole Limitless Empire waged an eternal war for some unknown purpose, and the torch had been passed onto him and a few others.

A shudder of hunger forced Zac to table the matter and turn his vision inward. Even if he didn't hold up much hope, maybe the Eternal Servant could provide some answers later. For now, he needed to deal with the blessings before his body did it for him.

His body had seen some improvements, which could be explained by the dozens of lights drifting about. He didn't have time to infuse **[Void Mountain]** with more than a third of the blessings during his fight against time. A few had been consumed when his mind grew hazy by the end, and even more had been absorbed during his vision.

His Cosmic Core had seen enough progress to let him advance a level, and a few stubborn imperfections to his core had been fixed. It was well within the range of a High Quality Core again after having seen some degradation from his breakthrough. His Soul Cores had seen similar improvements, removing heterogeneity and imperfections left from his heavy reliance on Moss Crystals and Oblivion Energy.

In addition, he felt like he'd gained a few years' worth of practice from the **[Nine Reincarnations Manual]**, which was a welcome boost with the

Atavism around the corner. Together with the stabilization brought from the Pilgrimage of Mind, he was well-positioned to make another leap of strength before he set out for the Imperial Graveyard.

A few blessings had entered his cells, sinking into the unfathomable depths beyond the golden hurricanes. Zac couldn't spot any benefits it brought, but he was sure it had improved his bloodline somehow. If lucky, the Void would return something later. The thought made Zac inspect **[Void Heart]**. It seemed fine despite having swallowed so many bundles of high-grade faith, though Zac suspected it'd be a while before it finished the job.

There were currently forty-one blessings left in his body. They could evidently be put to good use no matter where they went, yet Zac chose to stick with his original plan and corralled them toward **[Void Mountain]**. Summoning the illusory mountain wasn't easy, even with **[Void Engine]** having replenished a bit of Void Energy during the vision.

It grudgingly descended, still flickering precariously after the massive over-reliance. Luckily, it indicated its interest in more than half the blessings. Its drained state couldn't hide how it had become significantly more corporeal after having absorbed over thirty blessings. The improvements didn't seem to taper off as new blessings were added to its spirituality.

However, Zac noted that it lost interest in a particular blessing after having absorbed two more. The mountain had likely reached its needs for specific Dao Peaks, though Zac had a hard time telling which ones. Five minutes later, **[Void Mountain]** was fully satiated. Zac looked at the Void Sigil with a mix of gratification and regret as it faded away.

The talent was right at the cusp of some form of breakthrough, but Zac wasn't able to push it past the goal line since the mountain wasn't interested in any of the twelve remaining blessings. The good news was that Zac had a pretty good idea of what was missing—the Dao of Faith. **[Void Heart]** had siphoned off everything related to the Peak of Faith, leaving the pieces that were based on the saints' other Daos.

Zac was confident that he'd fill in the blanks the moment **[Void Heart]** finished its refinement. And if not, it wouldn't take too many treasures. Zac looked at the twelve remaining blessings, steering three to his Soul Aperture and four to his Cosmic Core. A surge of strength rippled through his body, confirming he'd gained another level. It was a welcome bonus, but the improvements to his core weren't quite as good as he'd hoped. The imperfections that remained

after all the treasures and encounters he'd been through were incredibly stubborn.

One blessing fused with his spiritual body, strengthening it and furthering its transition toward a conflict attunement. The rest could only be given to his cells, which had been clamoring after seeing such delicacies being given to everyone except them. A deep hum emerged from the steles the moment the final blessing was absorbed.

Zac warily looked on as each released a beam of energy that converged right before him. The strongest beam undoubtedly came from the Pilgrimage of Faith. It felt like a ray of pure providence. The streaks from the Steles of Combat, Body, and Mind were roughly equal, while the Stele of Heart barely released a trickle.

Together, they formed an illusory rune, its strength and balance based on his performance in the trials. Zac calmly grabbed onto it, knowing this part at least didn't differ from what the other templar candidates experienced. For him, the blessings were the largest gain, but this rune was likely the big one for most of the templars. The rune froze just as it was about to enter his body, and a set of screens appeared.

[Chosen of the Empyrean Chalice (Limited): Pass the five pilgrimages of the Empyrean Chalice. Reward: Base Attributes +500, Luck +15. Strength +13%, Dexterity +11%, Endurance +11%, Vitality +7%, Intelligence +6%, Wisdom +7%. Luck +15%. Effect of Attributes +10%.]

It was a limited title, a shockingly powerful one at that. It wasn't that the System graded his achievement higher than the feats that got him the other Limited Titles. Rather, the ranges became higher on Limited Titles as you advanced through the grades, and most of his other titles were awarded in E-grade.

It was easy to deduce why the attributes were so unevenly distributed. The Pilgrimage of Faith boosted Luck, and his almost impossible record got him a full mark of 15. The Combat score was at 12, and the next two 11. Finally, there was the Pilgrimage of Heart, which dragged down the boost to his Vitality, Intelligence, and Wisdom. The average score was 10, so he got that as Attribute Effect.

The missed-out potential stung, but it was just the cherry on top of his other gains. Zac chose to swap out **[Big Axe Gladiator]** after some deliberation. It

was between that and **[Equanimity]**, which he got from reaching the bottom of the Havenfort Chasm. The former focused more on Strength and Dexterity, while the latter gave a smaller boost to all Base Attributes. He'd already reached a point where focused allocation provided diminishing returns—lack of raw strength was rarely the cause of the problems he faced.

Name Zachary Atwood

Level 188

Class [D-Arcane] Evolutionary Precursor

Race [D] Human - Void Emperor (Corrupted)

Alignment [Zecia] Atwood Empire – Baron of Conquest

Titles [...] Arcane Ascension, Pathbound Core, Peakmender, Cosmic Introduction, Exalted Destiny

Limited Titles Tower of Eternity Sector All-Star - 14th, Equanimity, The Final Twilight - 1st, Gates of Rebirth, Void Road, Chosen of the Empyrean Chalice

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Dao Branch of the War Axe - Peak, Branch of the Kalpataru - Late, Branch of the Pale Seal - Late

Core [D] Evolutionary Core

Strength 218051 [Increase: 236%. Efficiency: 521%]

Dexterity 103232 [Increase: 176%. Efficiency: 346%]

Endurance 98856 [Increase: 206%. Efficiency: 546%]

Vitality 101799 [Increase: 215%. Efficiency: 543%]

Intelligence 21248 [Increase: 156%. Efficiency: 346%]

Wisdom 39542 [Increase: 159%. Efficiency: 363%]

Luck 1510 [Increase: 199%. Efficiency: 466%]

Free Points 300

Nexus Coins [D] 87 548 227

Zac thought he'd unearthed all his gains, but there were a few surprises on his Status Screen. The Holy Son title was missing, being hidden like the Terminus title. Even odder, his **[Destined]** title was gone and replaced with a new one.

[Exalted Destiny: Reach 1,500 Luck while in D-grade Reward: Effect of Luck +10%.]

The change was unexpected for multiple reasons. For one, the previous luck-based titles in the chain didn't remove their predecessor. Secondly, the next stage should have been 2,000 or 2,500 Luck. It looked like the System provided a 3% bonus after he'd overshoot the D-grade goal by a wide margin. Lastly, while the new Limited Title had awarded a significant chunk of Luck, it shouldn't have been enough to cross the 1,500 threshold. Zac looked around and soon found the reason.

[Void Road (Limited): Reject destiny in pursuit of the unknown. Reward: Luck +110. Exclusive. Upgradeable.]

The Void Road title had actually improved. He'd been waiting for something to happen after getting a related quest by the System when breaking through. However, the System had never given him any follow-up. Now, he finally had some clues on how to upgrade the title. The boost should have come either from clashing with the saints or facing the Imperial Fate in the vision.

There wasn't much else beyond the changes to his titles. He had gained two levels from the blessings, and **[Force of the Void]** had advanced another 4%, reaching 35%. Zac felt his Dexterity was in a good spot, so he allocated his free points into Wisdom and closed the screen.

Three days had passed since he entered the Halls of Service, and he had already reaped enough rewards for the excursion to be considered a success. It wasn't enough to make him forget being plotted against, but it was a start. Zac took a final look inside the room before turning toward the exit.

It wasn't without some fear he approached the spatial gate. He had good reasons for thinking the Eternal Servant tricked him the same way she did Joanna, where the ancient templar knew the only way he'd survive was to act

as he did. At the same time, it was undeniable he'd demolished a whole crypt full of interred saints.

His Draugr half and Ogras had already escaped when he began smashing statues. Not that they had any hopes of orchestrating a prison escape in case the Eternal Servant actually chose to target him. Esmeralda's entrance had been dealt with, and he'd already experienced the extreme disparity of strength.

There was no point in holding off the inevitable. Zac stepped through the gate, appearing before the stele of faith placed in the Halls of Service. The Eternal Servant hovered next to him, looking at his leaderboard entry of 108 blessings. The silence stretched until Zac could bear it no longer.

"I'm back."

"So this is our Terminal Son? A calamitous thief believing only in himself."

A ball of fire ignited in Zac's chest upon hearing the servant's scathing words and despondent tone. "Did I ask for this? You were the one who left me no choice."

"You always have a choice," the servant said, turning toward him. "The saints you profaned all had a choice. They could have escaped or given in. They chose death to uphold their values and beliefs. You could have done the same."

"I should have laid down and accepted death?" Zac spat through gritted teeth.

"You could also have stopped early. If you destroyed the scepter after the sword, along with sixty statues, you could have waited out the trial by the chalice inside your heaven-shrouding ability. Instead, you opted for greed, not sparing a single soul."

"That's..." Zac was about to refute her claim, but his voice lost its fight as his brows furrowed.

She was right. Dealing with the shockwave after destroying the scepter would have been rough, but it was by no means impossible. He could have used **[Extinction Event]**, the upgraded version of his Annihilation Sphere, to erase it. With only the chalice remaining, he could have taken his time to destroy statues with **[Void Zone]**.

That would have cost less Void Energy, leaving enough to resist a weakened Killing Array and block the chalice's energy collection until the candles went out. If he'd gone that route, his rewards wouldn't have been as impressive, but he also wouldn't have been marked as a Holy Son. Zac's convictions faltered, but he shook his head.

"There was no way for me to know that would work, and there was no guarantee the chalice was the final threat I'd have to face. What if the relics outside the crypt came alive? I couldn't take that risk, so I had to end the trial as quickly as possible."

"Righteous words to motivate plunder is no better than faith used to lead the virtuous astray."

Zac glared at the Eternal Servant, reluctantly choosing not to push the matter further. It was clear she'd achieved her goals, yet acted like Zac was the one at fault. But what could he do except hold onto his complaints until he was strong enough to do something about it? He was asking for a beating, trying to argue with a being multiple grades above him.

"Well, like it or not, I'm apparently the Holy Son of your order now," Zac said. "So what's next?"

An entirely too long silence stretched before the Eternal Servant shook her head. "I don't know."

"Uh, what?"

"I had destiny decide your fate, and it did. But the world I woke up to is foreign and unexpected, and only an echo remains of my faith. You want me to tell you what it all means, but who am I to ask? The sages are gone, lost in the river of time. We are both making our way through the darkness in search of a guiding light."

"So you have no mission for me? No holy quest?"

"Would you complete it even if I did? And not just seal off these ruins the moment you left?"

"Then... Are there any rewards for becoming the Terminal Son?"

"Consecration upon reaching the minimum threshold."

"Uh, anything else? Like treasures, inheritances, or opportunities?"

"Insatiable and shameless. Whatever benefits you believe your new status deserves, perish the thought. Even the two previous Holy Sons were treated no differently from ordinary templars. Their resources and rewards were based on their contribution to the cause."

"Fine," Zac said. "But your promise from before is a separate matter. Will you honor it and activate the Halls of Service?"

"No. The agreement said that passing four pilgrimages would allow you to exchange rewards based on your performance. I shall award you Glory Points accordingly."

"What? I passed all five!"

"That may be, but you also said you conceded on multiple occasions before and during the Pilgrimage of Faith."

"How does that count when you didn't accept my surrender?" Zac said, feeling his blood pressure rising.

"A shame, really. You should have believed in yourself, or at least in your affinity for destruction."

Zac mutely looked at the servant for a few seconds. There was something about their inexpressive face that made Zac's eyes narrow with suspicion. "... Wait, are you messing with me?"

"A small punishment for your actions, even if the trial was held inside a dream realm. It will take weeks for the ancestral souls to recover, you know."

"What the hell... Are you really an Eternal Servant?"

"Perhaps. Perhaps not. I took my Eternal Vow after the Fall, and this realm was sealed immediately after. My soul has been dispersed, yet I have not fully integrated with the Imperial Faith. I will not survive long."

Zac didn't know how to respond to the servant's candid confession, though it did lessen his ire a bit. Even if it might be because of Laondio's plot, he was the one who awoke the not-so-Eternal Servant, potentially ruining her chances

of fulfilling whatever mission she took the vows for. If he were in her shoes, wouldn't he have grasped at any opportunity to accomplish her mission?

"Rava."

"What's that?"

"You may call me Instructor Rava. I have decided to keep my identity since that part of me remains."

"Instructor Rava," Zac nodded. "Where's Joanna?"

"The Godking's inheritor is still undergoing her test. I expect it to take a week. Now, I have awakened the halls. The rest is up to you and your subordinates. I can sense that the Imperial Tutor has made the road of cultivation smoother, so I will adjust the criteria and requirements accordingly."

"Thank you," Zac said, looking around with anticipation as steles and gates were coming alive by the dozens. "My performance in the pilgrimage, how many points was it worth?" Read Web Novels Online Free

"The information stele has the answers you seek," the servant said, pointing at one of the large tablets behind the testing platform. "Now, I must leave."

"Instructor, wait! Can I ask—" Zac exclaimed, stopping her dissipation. "Eternal Servants are supposed to safeguard important treasures and institutes. And since this is a normal training facility..."

"You are wondering if there is a Holy Relic hidden here," the Eternal Servant said. "Does your cupidity know no bounds?"

Zac forged ahead despite the evident displeasure on Rava's face. "There's a war on the outside... We're leaving for a critical mission in three weeks. It might decide the fate of trillions of civilians."

"A Holy Relic? There is, and there isn't," Rava said after some thought.

"What does that mean?" Zac said with exasperation.

"The prerequisites are not yet met, so it cannot exist. It depends on fate and faith."

"Fate and faith..." Zac muttered. "And if the conditions are met?"

"Then..." Rava glanced in the direction of the main cathedral. "Then a seed of the Apocalypse will be unleashed upon the world."

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