

The Fall 1029

[Chapter 1029 - Edict](#)

Duplicity? Zac frowned as he had a worrying premonition, and he knew the situation had gone from bad to worse the moment [Immutability of Eoz] woke up. It was trying to purge something from his body. Judging by its persistence, it wasn't going well. Zac quickly sent a tendril toward the Specialty Core at his center, where his fears were confirmed.

Sealed.

An intangible barrier surrounded the Duplicity Core, utterly sealing its activation. Zac couldn't tell how the barrier worked or even which Dao it belonged to. Like the enormous rune in the sky, it felt like law rather than Dao.

"It took us some time, but we eventually deduced the trick to your transformation," Valsa smiled.

"You're truly a marvel. The Undead Empire really went all out for this pillar's ascent, modifying a Duplicity Core to such an extent. Even your path is harmonized with the Ultom Courts. Creating a being such as yourself must have been quite an undertaking.

"Still, a modified Duplicity Core is still a Duplicity Core. Nothing is without weaknesses. Thank you for staying put while the edict found its way here."

So that's how it was. He'd wanted to waste time to exhaust their energy, but she was also stalling. The good news was that she seemed to have misunderstood his origin, though that could be a ploy on her part. He'd half-expected her to divulge some pieces of information after displaying a few facets of his bloodline during the initial clash.

[Immutability of Eoz] was still trying to burn through the seal of his Duplicity Core, but it showed no progress, even with Zac using his Dao as a wallbreaker during the conversation. It looked like he'd be stuck with only one class for this battle, which definitely wasn't within his original plan. He'd planned to go all-out until his Cosmic Energy and skills were exhausted, at which point he'd swap and finish off the beleaguered enemies.

Was his current strength enough? It had to be enough. This imperial wasn't backing down now that she'd made her move. In comparison to Ultom, what did the Perennial Vastness matter?

Zac's heart thumped with realization. Valsa shouldn't even be here. She came from one of the peak factions in the multiverse. She had no reason to come here, yet she'd scrounged up enough tokens for a small army of deathsworn. It had always been about Ultom for her; she only came to fish for entrance tickets. It was possible she wouldn't even bother breaking through in this place. He, Ogras, and Catheya would be under constant threat as long as she was alive.

She couldn't be allowed to leave this realm.

There was no room to hold back, no room for mercy. With the seal in the sky, he would have to put all cards on the table. A storm of Cosmic Energy entered the newly minted fractal on his back, prompting the whole cage to rumble. Meanwhile, a ripple spread through Zac's Soul Aperture as his Evolutionary Core began spinning.

A construct emerged from the heart of the core, like a submerged statue being dragged out of a lake. Zac's eyes met Valsa's, and he could tell she had the same feeling. Both believed themselves the predator with prey right in front of them. One way or another, one of them would be proven right today.

"An Imperial Edict?" Zac said with a steely smile as his restrained aura exploded outward. "That's funny. I have an edict of my own."

The air twisted under the immense pressure of Zac's fully unleashed aura. Meanwhile, his Evolutionary Core was rousing from its leisurely swirl. It released massive amounts of Attuned Mental Energy, and it all went into the thing that had emerged from within the core.

The construct looked like a confusing gordian knot made out of dozens of Mental Energy tubes. The moment it appeared, it began extracting large amounts of Mental Energy and Dao from the Evolutionary Core.

There were over fifteen entrances to the maze-like mold but only one exit. From it, a complex stream of intermingled Dao emerged and entered the pathways of [Thousand Lights Avatar]. The Dao passed through Zac's body with blazing speed before entering the skill fractal on his back, [Primal Edict].

It had proven fruitless to cultivate the [Nine Reincarnation Manual] and [Void Vajra Sublimation] during his downtime while traveling or resting. After passing the first major threshold, the energy demands were too high, so Zac had focused some of his free time on other projects. One of them was the [Thousand Lights Avatar], which greatly benefited from Zac's evolved soul.

Cultivating the supportive technique had been effortless since forming the dual soul spirals. He just needed to urge the spirals to speed up, and they'd release large amounts of pure Mental Energy that could bolster his spiritual body. It still hadn't reached the point he could perform spectral walks, but it was far more corporeal than when he entered the Perennial Vastness.

More importantly, he'd confirmed that his idea of making pre-arranged braids worked. It began by growing two permanent braids of Mental Energy out of the framework, each one using nine strings. When they were finished, he detached them and moved them to his Soul Aperture. From there, Zac added more and more, making the braid increasingly complex.

Unfortunately, it had proven easier said than done, forming a working mold for a Dao Array, even if he had a working blueprint for his Cosmic Core. And with his odd constitution, he had found himself laughably bad at intuiting the correct path. Luckily, Zac had found a solution that saved a lot of time. His two Soul Cores were now attuned, and they could actually nurture the molds on their own by leaving them inside the core.

It was a slow process, and he had to take them out and run some Dao through them occasionally. Otherwise, the molds would be reabsorbed into the cores. In return, the Evolutionary Core had run its Dao through the knot tens of thousands of times, allowing it to grow increasingly complex over the past year.

The current iteration had gone beyond the classification of a Dao Braid, but Zac wasn't sure it could be considered a Dao Array. For now, Zac called them his Dao Molds, and they provided roughly 15% greater

power output compared to his old Dao Braids. Even better, they were very convenient to use, making it far easier for Zac to instill his attacks with his optimal strength.

The only downside was that the molds only had one setting right now; full blast, meaning an expenditure of quite a bit of Mental Energy and Dao. Thankfully, it wasn't a problem right now. Full blast was exactly what he needed.

A vibrant green haze poured out from Zac's body as [Primal Edict] activated, empowered by the Dao Mold. In return, the remaining ten enemies made their move. The soldiers steadily advanced, clearing the nearby trees without wasting much energy. However, none of them made any moves to target Zac.

He wasn't surprised. Their energy wasn't theirs to use. It belonged to their master. Besides, they clearly didn't want to stray too far from Valsa. Both sides knew she was the key to the battle. As long as they didn't spread out, they could collapse on him again. And with the trees being dismantled, it would be harder to force another ambush. Unfortunately for them, [Ancestral Woods] had long since reached Peak Mastery.

The skill had been his next upgrade after [Pillar of Desolation], and he'd tried to accomplish the same thing inside the Orom World. He'd come up woefully short that time, but he had still managed to push a High-quality F-grade skill into a Peak-Quality E-grade skill. Now that it also had reached Peak Mastery, it wasn't so easy to get rid of, and new trees were constantly sprouting. The resilience of the woods had grown far greater. Technically, Zac could keep regrowing the forest as long as at least 20% of the trees remained standing.

The only downside was that each tree he had to regrow cost a little more Cosmic Energy than the one before. The cost would become prohibitive if the warriors were allowed to act as lumberjacks for too long.

The remaining mages remained still like two statues, seemingly content to control what Zac assumed was the barrier. Of course, there was also the possibility of them preparing another nasty surprise like the one in the sky, so they were his main target.

Finally, there was Valsa. She radiated a blinding light like a celestial, and seven rivers of light emerged behind her. They ran through the sky above Zac's head until they reached the other side of the dome, and Zac immediately felt a pang of danger.

They fell like raindrops—thousand upon thousands of daggers of light, stabbing toward the ground. No wonder Valsa had waited to attack him until they reached this place. She had a Dao of Conflict to match her Dao of Light. Together, they formed intangible blades with incredible destructive capabilities.

In just a second, she had destroyed more ancestral trees than all of her followers combined. Zac wasn't much better off as a hail of projectiles constantly harried him. No matter where he dodged, they followed. It looked like she could at least partly control the things that fell. Meanwhile, two alabaster wings covered Valsa and her followers, creating a dome within a dome.

Zac felt his domain crumbling and desperately tried to maintain enough trees remaining—just a bit more. The emerald smoke released from his body had already permeated the whole dome, forming a beautiful moss that seemed able to live on just about anything. The ground was covered, as were the

trees of [Ancestral Woods]. Even sections of the energy dome made out of pure light gained a greenish tint as moss started growing on it.

Perhaps he shouldn't consider it odd. Light was a common source of nourishment for Life.

The moss didn't even need something to attach to. Floating clouds of green drifted about, or did for a second before getting ripped apart by the dagger rain. Even then, the surviving shreds just formed the cores of new clouds and began growing. Everything was consumed; everything became nourishment. The only thing still pure were the rivers in the sky, as the falling daggers shredded any Dao or energy that tried to get close.

In a sense, the true alpha predators of nature weren't the largest beasts that roamed the lands. The true terrors were the smallest members of flora and fauna. Mossy was a prime example of that, and the unique creature had been part of the inspiration for [Primal Edict].

Of course, creating a draining layer of moss was only the beginning.

Creaking sounds formed an ominous rattle before the world exploded with an exuberant hunger. Innumerable vines grew out from the moss, lashing out at anything that came close. They grew as quickly as Vivi's vines, covering the whole battleground in an instant. The seven warriors suddenly found themselves under assault by a tide of vines, and their progress was greatly hindered.

The vines didn't look quite like Vivi. For one, they were filled with as much Dao of Conflict as Dao of Life. As such, they weren't fully smooth. Instead, they had three protruding equidistant ridges, each forming a natural edge with powerful cutting capability. They weren't as strong as the blades of [Nature's Edge], but the dome was already crawling with them.

The tip of the vines was extremely sharp, and they had three barbs with far greater hardness than the rest of the vines. If they managed to pierce someone, it'd cost a chunk of flesh to rip them loose.

The vines which sprouted close to [Ancestral Woods] wound themselves around the trees, forming secondary armor before they shot toward the sky. Each Vine was like the spear of an E-grade warrior, and Zac smiled upon seeing they were individually more powerful than the daggers. Between [Adamance of Eoz] and his high Endurance and Vitality, they were extremely difficult to stop.

The vines shattered the raining daggers one by one until they were ripped apart, at which point they regrew. However, this came at a huge cost of Cosmic Energy and Vigor. The skill was already scaled to the point it could be mistaken for a D-grade skill, as were the seven rivers of light above. Zac wouldn't stand there and watch. He was normally confident when it came to wars of attrition, but not when faced with an elite with a squad of walking batteries by her side.

Besides, Zac doubted his enemy would be content watching things play out like that. He was immediately proven right as a cascading wave of light ripped through the domain. Unfortunately, the wave didn't head toward him, but rather the four remaining pillars of [Empyrean Aegis]. Zac sighed as he stepped into a tree, but he didn't move over to protect the core of his defensive skill.

Instead, he appeared at a tree close to his enemies, where eight slashes of light greeted him. Zac growled as his arm turned to a blur, and Vivi aided as best as she could as he pushed toward the closest

soldier. The golden world of [Empyrean Aegis] trembled as he stepped within the winged domain and felt a noticeable weight on his shoulders. The moment his defensive skill failed, it would get far worse.

Still releasing emerald mist, more and more vines grew around him, making him seem like an avatar of nature. The additional vines drastically lessened the pressure from the onslaught of attacks, but Zac saw how the falling daggers were already moving toward his new location. A huge rumble erupted behind, and Zac realized he had lost another two pillars of [Empyrean Aegis] from Valsa's earlier attack. He didn't have a lot of time.

Zac had felt just how powerful Valsa was. Truth be told, he had no confidence in dealing with her while she was powered with the array. He could gain another boost if he activated [Arcadian Crusade], but how could an imperial princess not have similar methods? He didn't want to put her under too much pressure and instead deal with her companions while barely hanging on. That way, he could burst out with full power and all his cards just as Valsa was at her lowest.

But Killing all seven with their leader breathing down his neck was tough. Breaking the cage and moving the battle seemed a good first step. There were no guarantees the seal on his Specialty Core would work within this specific domain, and he'd have more options if he could use the haze to hide and ambush.

Unfortunately, his enemies had already cut him off from his targets. Furthermore, he could tell space was manipulated within the wings. He wasn't confident [Earthstrider] would take him where he wanted to go. And when would he have time to move toward them, with Valsa swinging her sword right at him?

Verun yowled with pain and anger when the weapons clashed, and Zac once more found himself at the losing end of the collision. A deathsworn took the opportunity to skewer him through his ribs, barely missing and puncturing his lung. He was quickly forced back by an angry swarm of vines, but others replaced him as they nibbled at his heels without giving Zac a chance to finish them off.

The pressure from Valsa herself was also mounting. Zac barely managed to keep up enough pressure to prevent her from activating more skills, but she had more cards up her sleeve. It turned out he wasn't the only one who used armaments to fight. Furthermore, hers was a much more complicated style than what Zac used. Forty-nine flying swords emerged from the back of Valsa's Armor, forming a deadly Sword Array that bore down on him from every direction.

The celestial daggers raining from the sky joined them, but Zac was relieved to find out Valsa wasn't controlling them any longer. Vivi furiously fought them back, aided by the new roots constantly sprouting around them. One by one, the swords were slapped away, but they were unsurprisingly made out of top-tier materials. Zac suspected they weren't spirit tools but rather Supreme Quality Pseudo D-grade Weapons controlled by an Armament Tool Spirit.

Zac felt himself suffocating under the pressure, but making himself a target had finally borne fruit. A small tree had grown right behind his enemies as they were busy attacking him, meaning it was time. Zac dipped into his Void Energy stores and unleashed a storm of fractal blades, swallowing Valsa and her weapons in a hurricane of violence. At such close proximity, even she had to focus on defense for a second.

Simultaneously, more than fifty vines suddenly burst out of the small tree, like deadly parasites emerging from their hosts. Their blade-like tips pierced toward the same target, and there was a

palpable hunger for destruction in the air. The magical trunks of [Ancestral Woods] were no longer limited to transporting just Zac. During his epiphany, he'd figured out a way to harmonize his two skills, allowing the vines to do the same.

The synergy benefitted both skills greatly. [Ancestral Woods] was no longer just a domain and teleportation devise. Each tree was suddenly a deathtrap that could spring on anyone that got too close. He could just keep growing vines and trees on the other side of the battlefield. Any time a new tree sprouted on the frontlines, his enemies would find themselves overwhelmed by another wave of destruction.

Zac was still beleaguered from every side, but it was time he started turning things around on these imperials.