

The Fall 1031

[Chapter 1031 - Pressure](#)

Zac was already high-strung from being targeted for weeks and forced to fight for his life. But for some reason, he was even more enraged over Valsa's attempt to equate her callous sacrifice of her followers to the struggles he'd been forced to endure over the past years. It was not only an insult to him but to his path.

He was also all too clear there was no turning back from the grudge that had been formed. This woman thought herself justice, and thus all her actions were just. Someone like this wouldn't shy away from any methods to get what she wanted. She'd definitely target Earth if she managed to figure out his background.

The sudden rise in strength from her sacrificial array was an unwelcome surprise, but that didn't mean he'd lost. Zac was still filled with unending power and was in good enough condition to bring it all to bear. He'd never been as strong right now, and some spoiled false imperial wouldn't be the end of his journey.

Zac shot forward, drawing a ruthless arc aimed at cutting off Valsa's head. He could tell Verun was exhausted, but the Tool Spirit roared in encouragement as the edge drew closer. Valsa snorted as she moved her sword to parry, her aura stabilized at a level that was just above Zac's. Fourteen soul lamps floated behind her, pouring light into the War Regalia.

Weapons clashed, and the haze outside the broken barrier was pushed hundreds of meters away. It sounded like a bomb had gone off, but it was just the opening salvo which was immediately followed by a frenzy of attacks. The fused and refined Dao of his Dao Mold coursed through [Thousand Lights Avatar], illuminating the path of death and rebirth.

Zac and Vivi worked in perfect harmony, turning into violent blurs that tried everything to break through his enemies' defense. Valsa fought valiantly, but Zac sneered after a few seconds. As expected, her style was refined, but her strength was hollow. He could tell there wasn't much life-and-death experience behind her strength.

The difference in their attributes was smaller now that they both used Berserking Methods, and she couldn't overpower him in raw attributes like before. Without that, she was coming up short when faced with Zac's experience and skill. Her greedy expression slowly shifted into one of fury and fear as Zac methodically started dismantling her Sword Array and technique.

She repeatedly tried to activate her skills, trying to leverage the fact she had far more Cosmic Energy remaining. Zac wouldn't allow it, even if he had to take a small hit to disrupt her energy circulation. Finally, Zac broke through, and [Verun's Bite] bit into her side. The scene of blood and viscera raining onto the ground failed to appear. The War Regalia gained a nasty crack, but it actually withstood a full-powered attack.

Of course, the attack wasn't useless, even if Valsa avoided getting bisected. The princess groaned in pain and was launched further out from the cage's edge and the winged domain. He'd already realized her dagger rivers were mobile while the winged domain was not. The further away from it he fought, the better.

He also hoped that moving away from the corpses would break the connection, but no luck so far. However, one of the fourteen soul lamps had winked out, and another one was already waning. It almost felt like a counter until she ran out of steam, though Zac hoped that wasn't the case. After all, his [Arcadian Crusade] would expire before the lamps did unless something changed.

The situation had become a race, where one side needed to end things quickly and the other needed to delay. Of course, that was unless Zac managed to change form. Zac briefly activated [Void Zone] as he caught up to his prey, but it didn't help. The odd seal held fast even after the light dome was gone and he'd left its area. It showed no hint of weakening, and flooding it with his nullification zone did nothing.

Just how advanced was this method? There was no way she could do something like this herself. He once more looked up at the star with suspicion. Was there really an insider working with Valsa? After all, there was no way Engo was the only powerhouse hiding in the Perennial Vastness. And it wouldn't be surprising if a faction like the ancient imperials had some connections on the inside.

'Hey, she's cheating! There's no way she conjured that star seal!' Zac swore in his mind. 'Is your boss just going to look the other way?'

"I don't... I'll send a petition," Null answered, but Zac could tell the guide wasn't optimistic.

It was annoying, but he knew he couldn't rely on some ancient entity to come to his aid. The Multiverse had never been fair, and the ancient factions had always possessed this kind of advantage. Why else would Valsa strut around like she was the arbiter of justice?

Since the Fetters of Desolation was off the table, he would just have to finish the job in his current form. Zac was already upon Valsa thanks to [Earthstrider], and the princess didn't even get a chance to catch her breath before the storm of evolution tried to engulf her once more. Their eyes suddenly met, and Zac's disdain was met with towering fury.

"Trash!" Valsa spat as one of the gems on her crown cracked, releasing a blast of light.

Zac's mind screamed of danger, but he didn't dare back away. Instead, he pushed forward and activated another hurricane of Fractal Blades with his faltering stores of Void Energy. Hundreds of blades dug into four forms, but only one was left bleeding; the original Valsa. She hadn't managed to block out the point-blank burst completely.

Unfortunately, the protection of the War Regalia came more from its protective array than the armor itself. A shimmering barrier absorbed most of the damage, letting only a fraction pass through. It wasn't enough for a lethal blow, but a bloody gas ran down Valsa's face. Her left eye was completely ruined, while the other radiated a wave of almost unhinged anger.

"Die!" she shrieked, and Zac finally knew why she'd been distracted.

Three clones had appeared, wrought from the light released by the broken gemstone. Each one had an impressive aura, reaching at least 70% of Valsa's. Zac had no idea if this was a Tool Spirit skill or some other method available to the imperials, but it spelled trouble. He had already seen how his fractal blades had passed right through the clones as they formed without leaving any lasting damage.

Suddenly, four blades were trained at him instead of one, and the Sword Array tried to find an opening from above. Zac's pushed his techniques to the limits, his attacks growing increasingly ruthless and

designed to counter his opponent's Swordsmanship. But two hands couldn't fight eight, especially when the clones weren't fully corporeal.

Using the same trick as on the Hero Souls to stabilize them didn't work, and Zac was soon covered in wounds. If not for his upgraded constitution, he probably would've bled out already. The only good sign was that Valsa had an incredibly ugly expression as she almost maniacally tried to take him down. Conjuring these things had probably come at a significant cost.

For the first time since entering the crusade, Zac felt some hesitation. Should he back down? He couldn't even defend himself against this murderous quartet, let alone go on the offensive. But if he retreated, he'd waste the remaining time on his Berserking skill. He still had his weakened phase to worry about, and he risked being left at the mercy of Valsa.

Not to mention [Primal Edict], which he still needed to use to counter the rivers that had followed Valsa as they shifted the battle. He was running low on Cosmic Energy while the soul lamps fed Valsa. He really wanted to blast Valsa with an Annihilation Sphere, but he had no way to restrain her long enough to form one. Should he make one final attempt before risking activating [Flashfire Flourish] to regroup?

The Edict of Candor couldn't last forever. He was reluctant to leave this looming threat alive, but he didn't have a lot of options. However, Zac sensed something with his Soul Sense just as he was about to create an opportunity to escape.

"Sorry I'm late!" a familiar voice shouted as Kruta came into view, and Zac almost lost his composure upon seeing the wretched state his companion was in.

His right leg was simply gone beneath his knee. In place of a foot was a crudely attached inscribed bone that clearly was not Kruta's. Blood flowed from a deep cut on his left thigh, indicating he'd almost lost both legs from a single attack. Kruta's upper body wasn't much better off, with wounds covering him from head to toe.

"Wh-" Zac said, but the voice died in his throat as a golden lance pierced through the haze, narrowly missing the barbarian.

Kruta looked like a drowning man seeing a boat up upon spotting Zac, and he used a movement skill to appear behind him.

'I screwed up,' Kruta groaned in Zac's mind. 'Why did the reinforcements I stumbled onto have to be led by a champion? There are even three White Sigils in the mix! We need to run!'

'Soon,' Zac answered, his eyes gleaming with determination and madness.

Hadn't he just found himself at an impasse, unable to advance but unwilling to back down? It'd felt like he was caught in a game of deadly chess, knowing he'd be checkmated in twenty moves no matter what he did. Thank God for Kruta and his wretched luck! He'd arrived just in the nick of time, flipping the whole board over.

One form after another was already emerging from the haze, and even Valsa lost her composure. She tried to run away, but Zac endured a strike that ground against his ribcage, all to force her back toward the incoming puppets.

'A-Are you crazy!' Kruta stuttered as he continued to inch away. 'This is a main army! There are hundreds of normal puppets as well! I barely survived running from. A— wait, what's going on? Where are the others?'

'Dead,' Zac answered as he went on a furious assault while releasing waves of murderous intent in the Golden Champion's direction. 'Almost there.'

"You lunatic!" Valsa shrieked as she tried to disentangle herself, but Zac only laughed as blood poured out his mouth.

"Come on, princess!" Zac goaded. "Where are your elders now? So much for your imperial bloodline."

The champion had already turned its attention to them. It shot forward, its lance creating a trail of spatial tears as it made a beeline for Valsa. The princess gritted her teeth and had her clones target Zac as she prepared to deal with the incoming champion. Just as the Golden Champion was about to reach them, an ancient aura spread through the surroundings. Not Zac's, but Valsa's.

A shroud of stars formed out of light appeared, moving to form some sort of sigil. It was similar to the stars in the sky, though at an infinitely smaller scale. Did these imperials have a bloodline related to the stars? Or did it create a galaxy under the laws of Taiji? It didn't matter. This was his opportunity.

Zac forced his way through the barrier of clones, furiously blocking their strikes as Vivi dealt with the Sword Array. A flying sword dug into his shoulder, but he ignored the pain as he pushed on. Valsa had clearly expected Zac's strike, but her eyes widened in shock when the Dao was suddenly removed from her surroundings.

The conjured stars dimmed, and the runes on the War Regalia lost their luster. Even the clones turned sluggish, though they didn't wink out when exposed to [Void Zone] as Zac had hoped. This was what he'd aimed for since the beginning. He had used [Void Zone] a few times already, but never next to Valsa herself.

The two mages who'd been exposed to the odd domain had immediately died, bringing the secret of the nullification zone to their grave. It was all to catch Valsa unaware, and the appearance of the Golden Champion had provided the perfect opportunity. He'd even goaded her into using her bloodline to deal with the puppets.

Zac still didn't know what was going on with his ancestry. Was Laondio the true Limitless Emperor, or was Karz? Either case, the Void Emperor had to be a heritage that could suppress the bloodline of these false imperials. After all, they were only middling up-and-comers back then, clans that weren't qualified to participate in the construction of the System.

"No!" Valsa cried but was interrupted by a lance digging into her back.

She had put everything on the line to deal with Zac's swing aimed at her head, but [Void Zone] had rendered her bloodline talent useless. Blood poured down Valsa's mouth, and her aura flickered erratically. But she wasn't dead. Zac tried to finish her off, but he swore as another gemstone on Valsa's crown cracked.

A barrier appeared, pushing Zac back even with [Void Zone] active. The Golden Champion was also thrown off, and its lance was destroyed. It left a huge bleeding hole in her stomach, but it actually

started to close as a third gemstone cracked. Zac inwardly sighed as he saw the four still-intact gems on Valsa's head.

One had created the three clones that still were taking up most of Zac's attention. A second had created a barrier that could keep even him at bay. The third contained a powerful healing ability. Zac guessed that at least one provided soul protection, and the large gem in the middle reminded him of his [Lucky Beads].

But what about the other two? Another offensive and one for escape?

This was the headache of fighting with these elites. They were like cats with nine lives. He was one of the top five powerhouses of the Perennial Vastness, but he'd failed to kill over a dozen guests over the past year. They all had weird skills and treasures that got them out of death's grasp. Three had even managed to escape [Pillar of Desolation] somehow.

Zac wracked his brain, trying to figure out a way to seal the deal before Valsa could escape, but a scream of danger told him in no uncertain terms his window of opportunity was fast closing. The White Sigils had caught up with their leader, and Zac suddenly found himself sieged by two elite puppets and two light clones.

So it didn't work. He had underestimated these puppets, or perhaps overestimated them. [Void Zone] completely erased his presence, which he'd hoped would make the puppets ignore him. It had worked against that snake in the bottom of the Twilight Chasm, but it didn't seem to have any effect on these things. Were they going by vision rather than aura?

Valsa also got her share of suffering from the Golden Champion and the final White Sigil. Both were trying to break through her barrier, but they were temporarily unable to handle it. Meanwhile, Valsa's wounds rapidly healed, and Cosmic Energy Surged through her body. Zac grimaced, knowing he wouldn't be able to interrupt her skill this time.

A celestial emperor appeared above Valsa's protective bubble, its eyes already trained right at Zac. He felt an immense pressure bear down on him, which led to a series of wounds across his body. Of course, that wasn't the extent of the emperor's power, and he trained a sword in his direction. One circle of light after another appeared around the edge, and Zac felt a mounting sense of danger.

He had to waste what little Void Energy he had left to leave this place. But a drastic change occurred just as Zac activated [Void Zone] to stall puppets and clones. A twenty-meter Orc had appeared out of nowhere, and plumes of bloodlust poured out of his cells. He had a huge machete in his right hand and swung it at the sword with a roar that shook the whole region.

Machete and sword clashed, and the machete immediately crumbled. It couldn't withstand the pressure of a super-charged Valsa's blow. It did, however, forcibly push the sword to a side, and sweat poured down Zac's back as a pillar of pure light ripped apart a White Sigil right next to him. He'd barely avoided being turned into toast, though he felt the skin on his left side crackle and tear as it was exposed to the immense energies in the strike.

The pressure from the emperor decreased after the strike, but Orc Warchief didn't give up either. He actually jumped right at the opposing avatar with a mad laugh. The orc radiated immense battle lust. For a moment, Zac was filled with visions of ancient battlefields. Of endless rows of well-decked soldiers

encroaching the lands of the tribes. Greedy city-dwellers who had come to the wilderness because of their insatiable greed.

They hadn't expected the ferocity of the tribes or their willingness to bleed to protect their lands.

The emperor exhausted some more energy to destroy the warchief, but a storm of intangible blades ripped him apart the next second. It was the golden puppet who had paused its assault on Valsa to destroy the skill, properly fulfilling its role as backup.

Unfortunately, Kruta's stance wasn't enough to turn the tides of war, though it had protected Zac long enough for Valsa's barrier to collapse under the puppet's assault. She was once more locked in a deadly melee, unable to send any more skills his way.

"You!" Valsa screamed with anger as she desperately fended off the puppets, glaring daggers at Kruta, who tried to look inconspicuous to the side. "You think I don't know who you are, Kruta?!"

"I—" Kruta hesitated, but their conversation was interrupted by a swarm of Blue Capes who appeared through the haze.

Zac sighed as he saw the incoming squad. Over twenty Blue Caps with their weapons already drawn. He was full of reluctance, but there was nothing he could do.

It was time to leave.