

The Fall 1036

[Chapter 1036 - Fallout](#)

Zac panted as he looked down at Valsa's corpse, or rather the gathering of light that had started to dissipate. His hands were shaking with strain as he forcibly quelled the errant tendrils of Oblivion in his body, his pathways frayed and teetering on the brink of collapse. Yet, he felt thrilled, to the point that he didn't care about the possible ramifications of killing a princess from the old imperial clans.

It actually worked. Zac remembered the first time he envisioned what he'd just pulled off, way back when he still was experimenting with the 'brown flashes.' To channel the taboo powers of the Remnants into his skills, turning them into delivery systems of that ancient madness and destruction.

His [Origin Mark] and [Annihilation Sphere] were ultimately the crudest form of energy control. They were just raw blobs of unstable energy that he had to push into his enemy at melee range. They took time to charge, and it was getting harder and harder to actually land a blow. The Dao Mold had proven to be the key.

Instead of channeling his Dao and the Oblivion Energy into his shoulders, he'd crammed it into his Inexorable Mold. Through its complex pathways, Oblivion and Conflict had fused into something that had been just stable enough to briefly infuse into [Nature's Edge]. The result had been shocking, far beyond the level of what an E-grade Cultivator should be able to wield.

The blade of Annihilation had destroyed all the defenses the princess put up. Her supreme-quality sword was cut apart, barriers broke the moment they touched. Her, admittedly damaged, War Regalia had proven utterly incapable of stopping the descent. Zac had even seen the blank look in her eyes, confirming the skill had managed to erase her thoughts mid-fight.

That alone was a terrifying ability that could turn the tides of almost any battle. You couldn't afford any distractions when you walked the tightrope of a life-and-death battle. She had quickly managed to rally and crack a fifth jewel on her crown, but her response had been delayed. The gemstone had transformed her into a streak of light to drag her away, but the edge of Annihilation had carved a hole of nothingness right through her.

It had been enough to finish the fight—the enormous surge of Kill Energy and influx of Mana had proven that. She should be truly dead unless the Supremacies of the Planur Dynasty chose to drag her soul back from the cycle of reincarnation. If that was even possible, considering where she died.

Zac had long since learned of the possibility of reverting time and dragging cultivators back from beyond the grave. It was a common reason for Cultivators to push toward the peak. However, it went against the natural order, and even Supremacies would have to pay the price. Furthermore, there were many limitations. Where and how the cultivator died played an important role. Using Oblivion to kill Valsa would probably make it harder, and it happening deep inside the Perennial Vastness was likely to complicate things further.

The battle had lasted less than a second, but it came at an even steeper cost than their previous fight. The effects of the [Rageroot Oak Seed] had been mostly erased by channeling Oblivion, but that wasn't the real problem. Zac sighed as he looked at the cracks that covered his Dao Mold. It would likely take over a year to repair the damage; it simply wasn't sturdy enough to withstand Oblivion Energy.

He never intended to channel Oblivion through his two Dao Molds. At least not until a theoretical future where he had naturally evolved his Daos from Pure Life and Death to Creation and Oblivion. He had considered manually adding new Mental Energy pathways to the two energy highways formed from the remnants of [Cyclic Strike], using the Dao Molds as inspiration. Installing something like that would hopefully allow him to fully control at least the refined Creation- and Oblivion Energy.

That was a project he hadn't even begun, though. And this preliminary test indicated that pathways created with his Mental Energy still weren't sturdy enough to channel the Remnants without damage.

The good news was that the Dao Mold hadn't completely crumbled. It was even possible he could implement something that could withstand the Remnants sooner rather than later. Perhaps he could find some treasures or tools that reinforced the molds, allowing them to hold on a few seconds longer. And even if not, he at least had a new ace in case his life was on the line. Damaging his molds was far preferable to being cut down.

Zac's heart thumped at the possibilities laid out from the experiment, but he forced himself to focus. His new set of wounds wasn't a big deal, but Kruta still hadn't woken up and was still bleeding all over. They were also still in the middle of a Red Zone, and Zac had no idea what would happen now that Saeward's ascension had failed. He wouldn't be surprised if there were dozens of people rushing toward their location now that the puppets and Hero Souls were gone.

But those considerations were suddenly drowned out by a startling realization; the looming sense of danger still hadn't disappeared. If anything, the feeling rapidly worsened, as though Damocles' Sword was finally descending. A rumble in the sky made Zac's heart drop, and Valsa's treasures flew into his hands as he rushed toward Kruta.

Zac glanced at the sky as he ran and couldn't help but swear. The stars were finally moving again, but it didn't take a genius to realize that wasn't a good thing. They were no longer forming the Edict of Candor. Instead, the stars had formed an enormous face. It stared down at the Stand of Saeward; neither Zac nor the realm could withstand the attention.

The situation was rapidly going out of control—Zac felt like the laws of the universe were unraveling. The world shook, and Zac's mind blanked out from his Danger Sense overloading his mental faculties. It wasn't telling him to run or hide. It essentially told him it was over and tried to desensitize his frayed mind from his impending doom.

The pressure mounted, and Zac could not so much as blink as the castle disintegrated. Then the ground beneath his feet. Zac trembled as he saw a whole world wink out of existence. This wasn't Annihilation or Oblivion. It felt like a rejection. The face in the sky didn't condone the world, so the world simply wouldn't be.

He and Kruta were only alive because of a translucent barrier that had sprung up around them. Soon, there was just nothingness. It couldn't even be considered the Void; it felt more like Zac had been pushed out of the bounds of reality. His mind had ground to a crawl, unable to conjure any escape paths. He just blankly observed the terminus of his path as the translucent barrier started to fray.

Was this how Valsa had felt as she gazed upon the falling edge of Annihilation?

A sigh rippled through the boundless nothingness, and time moved in reverse. The disintegrated lands reformed, and the castle rose to enclose him. Even Saeward's puppet and array were restored to a pristine state, as though he'd never endured the Heavenly Tribulation just moments ago.

The only proof the events of the past minutes were real was that he still held onto Valsa's broken crown and Spatial Rings. The Kill Energy also remained in his body, though it was suppressed just as he was. There was also the enormous face in the sky, whose brows had scrunched together into a frown.

A world-ending force blotted out the heavens, but Zac felt nothing this time. In fact, the pressure on him had completely disappeared, thanks to the shield enclosing him growing much sturdier. Zac had an inkling of what was going on, and it was soon confirmed as a powerful voice cut through the rumbling sky.

"I looked the other way when you sanctioned a mark to be summoned inside my domain. But this cannot stand."

The voice was calm, like the mounting pressure, and its aura of rejection couldn't even be considered a minor inconvenience. More surprisingly, it came from just next to him. Zac looked over and found a man standing just a few meters away. There had been no hint of his appearance. He just was.

The man didn't look much older than Zac, but there was a palpable sense of antiquity to him—one that even surpassed the feeling of his bloodline. There was an unmatched transcendence to his bearing and aura, as though he had fully severed any connection to the emotions and desires of mortals. He was beyond the vicissitudes of time, radiating unquenchable stability. Of all the people Zac had ever encountered, none had so perfectly encapsulated the air of an immortal Cultivator.

His appearance was more elven than human, but his skin veered toward a pale blue. He was decked in a simple white robe with wide sleeves, its lack of details and runes made it seem even more exquisite. His eyes looked like a vast starry sky, and Zac couldn't look at them for long without feeling his soul being sucked in.

Zac quickly turned his gaze toward a set of antlers on his head, but the thrums of power they released almost broke his mind. He barely managed to observe that one of the antlers had nine tines while the other had eight before he was forced to avert his gaze. Each had naturally formed patterns that struck at the heart of the Dao. It was like the man wore a crown of the Heavens themselves.

It was too much. The Daos sealing the Dimensional Seed in the heart of the Research Base had been bad, but this was infinitely more overbearing. The screams of danger were immediately overwhelmed by the crashing waves of the Dao. Looking away or holding onto his Void Self wasn't enough, and Zac felt his path being overwhelmed and eroded by a far greater truth.

But just like the erased world reformed, so did Zac's mind. Suddenly, the man next to him didn't seem so bad. He didn't emit a speck of Dao or aura, and it almost seemed like the overwhelming sensations just now had been an illusion. But was it? Zac's heart shuddered, and his mind spun. Had he just died and been reformed? Zac had no way to tell, and there was no time to come to terms with the situation as the face in the sky spoke.

The elven man's voice had been calm and steady, but the constellation's voice sounded like stars colliding and worlds being ground to dust. They were a force of nature rather than speech, yet somehow

formed words. Zac could tell that the world would have collapsed again if not for the newcomer's protection. Worse, what the face said was even more terrifying than how it said it.

"Someone killed my daughter."

Zac had been working under the assumption that someone like Lord Engo had been helping the Planur Dynasty accomplish its goals inside the Perennial Vastness. But the conversation had indicated that to be wrong, or at least not the whole truth. The face, just like the Edict, belonged to an outsider rather than a disciple of the Perennial Vastness.

There was no way some Autarch would be able to, or even dare, force his way into the Perennial Vastness. He was dealing with a Supremacy from the First Heaven.

"So they did," the man next to Zac said without so much as a ripple on his face when the heavenly pressure mounted.

"The threads are obscured and the timeline is sealed," the sky rumbled. "You're preventing me from seeing the truth. Daoist Sendor, are you breaking the pact of non-interference?"

"I am precisely protecting the neutrality of my realm," the man next to Zac countered, the answer confirming his identity.

The face had called him Sendor, but it was the Perennial Vastness in the flesh. Zac had suspected as much since his sudden appearance and the ability to reverse the destruction of a whole world, but it was possible he'd sent one of his disciples.

"You and your daughter brought the conflict of the Fifth Pillar to my doorstep. I acceded, as it's inevitable that outside struggles will reach the Cosmic Galleries. But you went so far as to supplant the Heavens inside my domain!" Sendor continued, a hint of steel appearing in his voice. "Your offspring made her play, going so far as to summon your Edict to achieve her goals. It failed, resulting in her demise."

"Impossible!" the sky roared, and the world flickered like a candle in the wind.

"Greed has always been the downfall of your kin," Sendor sighed as he stabilized the Stand of Saeward.

There was a sense of helplessness in his voice, like an elder witnessing the mistakes of the younger generations yet unable to make them listen to reason.

"Your great grandfather's generation ignored my warnings when they discovered the Sealed Mausoleum, and the fallout cost you six Supremacies. The Seventh Heaven already has a Flamebearer. To hunger for a second was to tempt fate."

A snort rumbled through the world, but the face made no attempt to refute the claim. Zac mutely listened in on the conversation, memorizing every word. It even felt like the Perennial Vastness intentionally provided him with valuable information. Zac had never heard of the Sealed Mausoleum but inwardly vowed never to go there.

Zac wasn't too surprised the imperial families had managed to seize a seal, even a slot for a Flamebearer. They likely had a lot of inside information, and their resources were staggering. The fact it

was the Seventh Heaven was news, though. The problem was, would he even remember that fact upon leaving the Perennial Vastness, or would it be sealed along with his memories of Valsa?

"The conflict for the Pillar cannot be allowed to taint the gallery any further," Sendor continued. "I will not discipline the young or bar them from entering future galleries. They are mere tools for the larger struggle. I will, however, seal the ripples of the Left Imperial Palace within my domain. You will have to continue this conflict on the outside."

"Fine," the sky acceded after a short pause. "Let me extract my daughter, and we'll forget this matter."

Zac's heart dropped upon hearing the demand. The Planur Supremacy wanted Valsa's soul. Zac had been pretty confident his secrets were safe just moments ago. However, between the display just now and his lingering sense of danger, he wasn't so sure. Would the imperials be able to piece together Zac's identity if Valsa was returned?

Worse, Sendor didn't immediately reject. Instead, he slowly nodded as a mysterious ripple spread through the realm. Zac tried to plead for the Perennial Vastness to change his mind, but something prevented him from speaking or sending mental messages. Then, the sky shook, and boundless wrath rained down from above.

"You!" a raging roar echoed through the universe, but Sendor shattered the sky with a wave of his sleeve.

"Bastard, that'll teach you to play around inside my body," Sendor snorted, his disposition suddenly completely different.

The face in the sky dispersed, and Zac was finally rid of the looming sense of danger that had followed him for weeks. He thoughtfully looked up at the stars rearranging themselves to their normal state. Was that the key? A Supremacy had been involved in the scheme against his life. Such beings created powerful ripples on the river of fate, which could explain why his Danger Sense had been triggered weeks in advance.

Zac's eyes soon turned back to the avatar of the realm he stood inside, and Zac's heart thumped upon realizing the man was looking back at him.

"Thank you," Zac said after realizing his mouth was no longer sealed. "Uh, what—"

"Vastermal Planur wanted to resurrect his daughter. Except, he didn't care about her life. He only extracted her memories, sacrificing her soul and body to circumvent my rules. I guess he wanted the identity of you and the other sealbearers she had exposed," Sendor explained as a mischievous grin spread across his face.

"Unfortunately for the arrogant little brat, I manipulated the flow of time, tricking him into extracting the memories from six years ago. Long before you even entered my trial. Now, he got nothing useful but still has to deal with the Cosmic backlash. Do these grasshoppers think they can pull one over on me? I was already ancient when their clans were nothing but insignificant households."

Zac could barely believe what he was hearing. For one, it sounded like the Perennial Vastness was even older than the Limitless Empire and the System itself. Zac couldn't even begin to comprehend how long Sendor had existed. It far surpassed the nigh-inexhaustible longevity of even Supremacies.

But why did he look like a kid who had just pulled off a prank? It was completely different from the previously transcendent aura he exuded. The more old monsters he ran into, the more it felt like they all had a couple of screws loose. Still, it was undeniable that Sendor had not only saved his life but angered a powerful Supremacy to protect his identity.

However, the question remained why the avatar looked at him with such an unsettling gaze.