

The Fall 1051

[Chapter 1051 - All for One's Dream](#)

The usually crowded Road of Repentance was abandoned. The hawkers had left their stalls where they stood, and the enshrined patrons were without reverend attendants. A suffocating silence held the road in its grip, and his approach only amplified it. The sounds of his boots stepping on the glazed tiles were annihilated, creating the illusion of illusion.

The same was true for the birdcage hanging from a chain wrapped around his left arm. Oblivion swept away the anguished screams of the men and women trapped inside. They only got to live on in his mind for a brief instant before being forever erased from the river of time. Some thought him a ghost, and while his corporeity was still there, they were not exactly wrong. Since he accepted this path, he'd become the ghost of future's sin.

It all had to be torn down before it was too late.

The walls of Emyr's Sanctuary rose toward the sky, a bastion of salvation that had served as a both administrative and spiritual capital for eons. False salvation, certainly, but he still felt a muted pang of sorrow that his path had led him back here. The fact that he felt anything at all proved that the centuries spent inside these vermillion walls weren't so easily erased.

Atop the ramparts stood the Celestial Guard, thousands of them decked in glistening armor. He could feel the fear, the hatred, the despair. The four outer sanctuaries had already fallen at his hands, where utter nothingness was left in his wake. Yet they stood tall, remembering their training and their oaths.

Above the central gate floated a vaguely familiar face, her expression marred by sorrow rather than the mixed bag of the soldiers below her. He tried to remember who this priestess was, but he couldn't match it with those he knew during his years in Emyr's Sanctuary. Then again, it was all so blurry. She clearly recognized him yet dared to fly out of the protective barrier to speak with him.

"Lord Norosa, you have to stop!"

"Norosa... A name I haven't heard in a long time," he spoke, his voice gravelly from disuse.

"It's not too late to turn back. You are inviting a calamity. On yourself, on the citizens of the Holy Empire!" the priestess entreated, hesitating a second before continuing. "You said the core tenet of the clergy was to serve. Is this how you serve?"

So it was her.

To think that little nun become an Ecclesiastic Tributary in a short 800 years. Sina, was it? He remembered the young acolyte who had been so full of righteousness, openly catechizing her local bishop over his excess. How she'd approached his fellow inquisitors to mete out justice against a fellow member of the cloth.

Come to think of it, it was around that time his faith had started to waver, when he'd begun noticing the cracks beneath the vermillion veneer. She hadn't changed much except for a few marks left by the passing of time and the burden of office. He was surprised someone like this had risen so far through the ranks in a few centuries.

"Turn back?" he said, a dark smile spreading. "I severed my name along with my past. I sacrificed it all to build the bridge toward the future. To cleanse these rotten lands, I will become an avatar of extermination, even if I have to sacrifice my immortal soul. Only through destruction can rebirth take place. That is how I serve."

Confusion, anger, and revulsion when she looked at the cage. He wondered if she recognized the men and women who had become fuel for the undertaking. If she did, she didn't seem to care about their fate. Was this young woman truly an enemy or someone who had been pushed to the forefront because of their tenuous connection?

Sina opened her mouth as struggle appeared on her face.

"I've recently learned what happened, what the church tried to cover up. But you should better understand the truth than anyone! It's all because of those things," she said. "It twists minds, turns devout servants into madmen. Keeping the five sins of extermination sealed is the burden our church has borne for millennia, all to keep the citizens safe!"

He only shook his head in response. So the little nun thought it was revenge.

"Our training and piety don't make us immutable," Sina pressed on, her pure eyes pleading. "The sin of extermination never lets up, and our mortal minds can't fully block its immortal will. Mistakes were made, and tragedy struck, but the events at Polsara are not indicative of the church as a whole! If you fulfill the prophecy, everything we've worked toward will be undone. Emyr's sacrifice will be undone."

It looked like she still didn't understand the truth. Mortals weren't the only ones who could be corrupted by the immortal will of extermination. Emyr's sacrifice had long since been undone by the twisted will of Emyr himself.

"That's exactly what has to happen," he said, pointing [Edge of Oblivion] against the city. "Right or wrong, the chains have to be broken. I have set out on this path, and I will see it to the end. For our history, I hope you will give way. The citizens will need guidance after the collapse."

"You know I cannot do that," Sina said, tears running down her eyes as five halos sprung up behind her back.

The halos grew to cover the whole gate, each stretching hundreds of meters into the air. Sky shook, and one red pillar of light after another descended as the Celestial Array answered her call. He looked upon the scene with equanimity. The situation was lamentable, but it wasn't enough to create a ripple in his heart.

Four roars of extermination entered his sword, and a wave of Oblivion rippled forward. The young nun channeled the whole sanctuary's accumulated faith in a desperate attempt to block, and the warriors atop the walls formed an interlocking wall of shields. It wasn't enough.

Sina, along with his memories of her, were consumed, and the outer wall of Emyr's Sanctuary was no more. Four emaciated sinners finally had nothing more to give, and their final wails of pain and release echoed in his mind as ash drifted out of the birdcage. He barely noticed it. The wall's collapse had finally let him sense it.

The fifth artifact of extermination. The key to stopping the resurrection of the mad god.

The fourth Splinter of Oblivion didn't assault Zac with a confusing and endless series of miserable fates. It only showed him three, each far more detailed than those before it. The Grand Inquisitor Nosora who sacrificed everything to save his country. To destroy the nightmare created from a god's soul utterly tainted by the Splinters of Oblivion.

The Seven Desolates Emperor, who turned his small duchy into a powerful empire through a ruthless campaign spanning millennia. The Oblivion Dragon who hunted down splinters to enhance its bloodline.

The goals of these three were completely different, as were their temperaments. The one thing in common was that all four held four Splinters of Oblivion in their souls. Furthermore, while they all struggled against the madness, they still held onto their purpose. Mostly. Whether it was Nosora, the emperor, or the dragon, they had lost most of their emotions.

But in their case, it wasn't without their awareness. It was the price they willingly paid for their Dao, for their goals. They had severed pieces of their soul to feed the remnants, much like some Cultivators severed their seven emotions and six desires.

Was that what the Heart of Oblivion wanted to show him? That it was fine if he wanted to borrow their power, but a price had to be paid. That was simply the Law of Balance. It was a stark difference from the visions he had endured inside the Orom World. Those scenes had been filled with despair and defeat, like the splinters were trying to drown him in despair and doubt. His Dao Heart had almost crumbled then, and the experience was the main reason he'd been so eager to practice his [Void Vajra Sublimation].

Now, it almost felt like all that hard work was for nothing.

Had the remnants realized his Dao Heart had grown far stronger since and instead opted for negotiation? Or was it another trap, an attempt to steer him down a path of no return? Ultimately, it didn't matter much, and this wasn't the time to figure things out. The splinter had already entered his body, and Zac ushered it toward his Soul Aperture before it could unleash too much destruction on his body.

Meanwhile, he furiously rebuffed any Oblivion Energy that got close to his Duplicity Core. He even sacrificed some of his hold on the splinter to create a durable barrier of Mental Energy aimed at protecting the hatch.

The world sped up again, where an urgent warning of danger and shrieking fury greeted him. The undead Gwyllgi understood what had happened, and its murderous intent was powerful enough to make the whole star quake. Not that it needed any help in that department. The splinter had infiltrated the Stellar Core for who knows how long, and Zac could sense how its vast energies were fast going out of control.

The situation inside his soul mirrored the chaos outside, with the splinter releasing torrential amounts of Oblivion while trying to break into the prison. Luckily, Zac had both experience and the strength of a Three Fates Soul this time around and managed to simultaneously reinforce the prison and rebuff the new splinter.

However, a sudden chorus of madness and destruction threatened to overwhelm even his reinforced Dao Heart. The four splinters formed a powerful resonance, resulting in a far greater impact on his mind. And the more the splinter's Oblivion tainted his soul, the harder it became to resist the corruption.

The screams of danger grew more urgent as a black sphere shot out of the Gwyllgi's mouth and entered the ball of destructive flames already bearing down on him. The sphere made the fireball condense until it was no more than five meters across, just a small ember in front of the deathly sun. However, the aura it suddenly radiated filled Zac with terror, and it made him realize he had underestimated just how angry he'd made the Late-Stage Beast King.

The crazed beast had actually spat out its Beast Core to reinforce the attack.

Doing so was an act of all-out aggression. The attack would contain the full force of the Beast King's cultivation base, but it was extremely dangerous. Damage to the Beast Core could mean millennia of weakness until the damage was repaired. If it broke, the Beast King was crippled. In other words, the Gwyllgi was putting everything on the line to kill him.

Seeing the situation, Zac opted to go for broke. Madness and determination gleamed in his abyssal eyes as he dragged the accumulating storm of Oblivion out of his soul, steering it into his hand. Pain wracked him as small cracks covered his skin, but there was nothing else to do. A beam of pure nothingness shot out of his hand, but not toward the incoming blast of deathly flames.

Instead, it carved a tunnel straight through the Stellar Core, and Zac rushed inside. The sudden attack was the straw that broke the camel's back, and the sun went supernova. The core exploded, unleashing a shockwave that tore apart space like it was made out of paper. Zac was right at the epicenter, but pulses of Oblivion consumed most of the force crashing into him.

The same was true for the incoming attack. The Gwyllgi's desperate attack tore through the sun's outer layers like it was nothing, but the following shockwave was another thing entirely. It was filled with the energy of a sun corrupted by Oblivion for who knows how long and then augmented even further by Zac's outburst.

The two forces collided, forming spatial tears that stretched for kilometers. A scream of pain and anger pierced Zac's already beleaguered soul, leaving a set of surface cracks across both Soul Cores. The sense of danger had mostly abated, proving his plan had worked.

Zac was killing two birds with one stone. He needed to vent the unbearable amounts of Oblivion before his Soul Aperture was overwhelmed, and he needed to deal with the incoming threats. Or perhaps you could say three birds with one stone, even if the last benefit levied a painful price across his body.

Skin tore and bones snapped as deadly force pushed him forward, out of the inner mantle and out of the collapsing star. A second shockwave followed the first as the black sun expanded. The explosion accelerated Zac even further, turning him into a streak of black.

A streak that moved right toward the golden sun in the distance.

Zac breathed out in relief upon seeing his guess had been true. Only one consciousness with a strong mark of Life had inspected him as he approached the deathly star. Similarly, none of the life-attuned beasts had targeted him with killing intent as he moved on the splinter. Why would they? Life and Death

didn't mix, and having two opposing suns locked in orbit made cultivation much harder. The Life-attuned Beasts would probably have destroyed the deathly sun themselves if they had the strength.

Then, a creature finally emerged, and Zac's heart shuddered as he prepared for the worst. The thing that had emerged was an enormous elemental, slightly resembling a jellyfish. Dozens of intensely golden lights shimmered in its "head," and its long tendrils crackled with powerful bursts of life. Its aura was a match to the Gwyllgi's, and Zac could feel he was in the center of its attention.

Zac gritted his teeth, preparing to use another salvo of Oblivion to meet the Beast King. But the thing actually passed him by, only spitting one of the golden lights in his direction before moving on. Zac was confused at first but soon realized its goal. The jellyfish was targeting the Gwyllgi's Beast Core, which had been thrown far away by the supernova explosion.

The Late-Stage Beast Core had emerged almost unscathed from the clash. Only a few small marks could be seen on the core's surface, though it had lost much of its accumulated energy. Zac had hoped the explosion would disintegrate the core and cripple the beast, but this situation wasn't too bad.

A Late-Stage Beast Core of such a powerful beast was undoubtedly an amazing cultivation resource for the jellyfish. It could probably use its opposing element to hone its core, just like how Zac cultivated using his [Nine Reincarnations Manual]. Better yet, it belonged to its biggest rival, making it too tempting to ignore.

Zac could probably destroy the incoming attack with another burst of Oblivion. But he wanted to use as little Oblivion Energy as possible since paying the splinter's price with outside resources wasn't easy. He had no birdcage with souls to drain to fuel the destruction. Instead, he threw out a large boulder filled with Explosive Talismans and Miasma Crystals before turning into an Abyssal Wraith with Void Energy.

Using his Void Energy prevented most Oblivion Energy from sneaking into the Skill Fractal, but he still felt himself leave a trail of annihilation in his wake. A huge explosion erupted behind him as light and boulder collided, and Zac sighed as he saw the small sphere emerge untouched from the clash. It veered toward him like a bloodhound.

He kept going, crashing into the life-attuned flames. Searing pain filled him as Life poured into his body. Some aspects of his Void Vajra Constitution carried over through [Quantum Gate], but an undead being's inherent revulsion toward Life trumped the effect of his Body Tempering Manual. He might be the Draugr who could best resist the poisonous rays of Life, but being in the middle of a Life-attuned Sun was to ask for trouble.

Yet Zac pushed on, using [Void Zone] to give himself some breathing room as he dug deeper. The light was almost upon him, but Zac was ready. A huge eruption of Oblivion consumed the light, creating a 100-meter energy vacuum as everything was annihilated. The shockwave pushed Zac further toward the core, and he relaxed when his Specialty Core activated without giving him any trouble.

Life replaced Death as Draugr became Human, and the burning flames closing in on him no longer felt very threatening. The true threat came from the jellyfish far in the distance, who had finally realized Zac wasn't satisfied with wrecking just one of the suns.

Unfortunately, it had already made its move against the Gwyllgi. The jellyfish had tried to hit its old nemesis while it was down and was now getting its just desserts. The Gwyllgi obviously understood what was going on, and Zac laughed when he saw it opt to block the jellyfish rather than target him again.

He pierced into the star using Oblivion, making much greater progress thanks to the overwhelming amount of energy in his body. The shard sensed the intrusion of its fated nemesis, and powerful waves of Creation pushed toward him as the remnant fought back. Zac could tell it had detached already, shooting toward him like an arrow.

Zac's whole Soul Aperture shook as the splinter tried to break free, either to attack the nearby shard or to break out its companions. The trapped remnants were also going insane, and the runes keeping them trapped were flickering precariously. A mental command opened the gates before it was too late, and six streaks of light raced into his Soul Aperture.

However, before the four splinters could unite against their mortal enemy, time slowed down once more as Zac grasped an opalescent mark.