

The Fall 1054

[Chapter 1054 - Nucleus](#)

Zac flashed forward, appearing by the gates of his mansion. The powerful waves of energy greeted him by burrowing into his body, but it didn't feel like a hostile infiltration. It was akin to a gentle caress, like a missing part of himself coming home. There was no mismatch, and it barely took him any effort to make the energy his.

Was this how it felt to be a cultivator? Zac shook his head and continued toward a cultivation chamber he rarely entered. It used to be a conventional chamber with custom arrays based on your blueprint. The arrays helped cultivators speed up the formation of their Core Nuclei, but those things didn't work on him.

As such, the room had mostly gathered dust in his mansion, except when he occasionally secluded himself to ponder some aspects of his core formation or [Cosmic Forge]. He could feel that the energies were gathering there, meaning it had already been rearranged for the next step. Zac was eager, but he didn't immediately open the gates. He first sent out a short message to Catheya and Ogras, confirming he'd succeeded and that he was entering seclusion.

"I'm secluding myself," Zac said out loud after receiving two answers of well-wishing.

"Affirmative," Null said. "Your final tally is 130,784 Mana, granting you a fourteenth-echelon breakthrough environment. Your special requirements have been accepted. All other features of the Cosmic Gallery have been deactivated."

Null was clearly following protocol, but Zac could hear her voice trembling with a mix of fear and anticipation. Null had a lot riding on this, just like him. If he failed his breakthrough, Null would be no more, no matter how splendidly he'd performed over these past seven years. Succeed, and Null would be awarded a true soul, becoming a permanent resident of the Perennial Vastness.

And being the guide to a fourteenth-echelon cultivator with such a unique blueprint probably came with additional perks.

"Thank you for all your help these past years," Zac smiled. "I won't let you down."

"Thank you for working so hard," Null answered. "Good luck."

The next moment, the connection between him and the bracelet was cut, and it disappeared soon after. He could no longer sense the guide's presence, and she didn't answer his calls. Zac tried sending Catheya another prompt to confirm the situation. As expected, nothing happened. The outside had been sealed off.

Core Formation was the ultimate goal for those visiting the Perennial Vastness and the guests' final opportunity to provide Sendor with something he could use for his undertaking. There could be no distractions at this juncture. The gates of the cultivation chamber swung open as Zac approached, but he was surprised to see it led to a teleportation gate.

This wasn't what he'd heard from Null before when putting forth his requirements for his Core Formation. Normally, the Perennial Vastness would add the Core Formation arrays to the chamber,

which your mansion's Mana Domain then empowered. There was no one to ask about the situation, so Zac simply stepped through.

The surroundings shifted, and Zac suddenly found himself standing on a disk far up in the air. However, the scenery was still very familiar. Looking down, he saw his manor, and the range of sanctified mountains stretched across the horizon. He'd been placed on a floating platform five hundred meters above Mount Illumination.

For a moment, Zac felt like he'd replaced the gargantuan Buddha he'd seen when first stepping onto Mount Illumination. He looked down at the lands and somehow felt connected to it. He could also see that the mountains formed a vast natural formation, generating unfathomable amounts of energy.

Energy which was slowly flowing toward Mount Illumination.

The gateway disappeared behind him as he walked onto the platform, and incredibly complex runes lit up beneath his feet. The whole ten-meter disk was an array, and its activation was the beginning of a huge transformation of the surroundings. First, five smaller array disks flew out from beneath the platform, each emitting different aura fluctuations.

Zac recognized them as being part of his special requests, but he didn't get the chance to properly inspect them before the whole universe shook. One moment, the expansive vista was the same one he'd gazed at for years. The next, the air was filled with multiple sets of threads that hummed with power.

The threads formed a huge tapestry that stretched further than Zac could see, filling the world with gold, black, and steely grey. Some tapped into the mountains, siphoning and transforming their vast energy reserves. Others dug into the ground or even reached deep into space. Many connected with Mount Illumination below, which eagerly supplied its already transformed energy.

The scene reminded Zac of when Yrial imparted him with a piece of his Dao, where threads had descended from distant stars. The threads pulsed like a heartbeat, dragging vast amounts of energy toward the platform. Or rather, toward the ancillary arrays, who further refined the payload before depositing it on the platform.

The tapestries' attunements were almost an exact match to his Daos, and the energy density atop the platform quickly approached a level where they could be considered liquified Natural Treasures. A mortal with a shallow foundation could almost form a Cosmic Core using the ambient energy alone.

This kind of benefit undoubtedly came courtesy of reaching the fourteenth echelon. He didn't just get to usurp the energy of Mount Illumination; the whole Mountain Range became fuel for his breakthrough. Such treatment was one of the keys to forming his core without too many impurities. The Dao Threads were far from enough to fully satiate the demands of someone like him, but they would lessen the number of treasures he'd have to throw into his Duplicity Core by a third.

There was a fourth tapestry, which was quite different from the other three. The tapestries of Life, Death, and Conflict were connected to two outer arrays each. Conflict had two to itself, while the other Daos got one platform to themselves while they were forced to share the fifth. The Fourth tapestry was connected to all five ancillary arrays.

However, it didn't extract any energy from the surrounding mountains. It simply accompanied the other three sets of thread like a shadow. The tapestry still emitted weak fluctuations of force, but the phenomenon was almost completely obscured by the powerful waves dragged toward him. The tapestry also didn't channel any energy into the outer arrays, making it even harder to spot.

It would have taken Zac a while to notice the fourth tapestry if not for his intimate familiarity with what the environment represented. The threads portrayed his path, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say they pictured his blueprint. The fourth tapestry was the Void. And while it wasn't nearly as stable or energy-dense as the other elements, Zac was actually quite surprised the Perennial Vastness managed to form something so closely resembling the real thing.

It was almost like Zac had been shrunk down to a mote of dust and placed inside the Simulation Array back in his mansion. The circular array he stood on was placed right where the Cosmic Core's nucleus would be, and he couldn't even see the edge where his core ended. It was quite the place the Perennial Vastness had prepared for his Core Formation.

The ample energy being funneled toward him was not just there to provide raw energy for his breakthrough. There was a reason they were connected to the outer arrays rather than the main one. This whole setup was a unique feature for mortals, while most cultivators only used a main array.

Three outer arrays were refinement platforms for the treasures going into his core. As such, they were based on Zac's respective Daos; War Axe, Kalpataru, and Pale Seal. The Perennial Vastness had provided the arrays in exchange for 5,000 Mana. They and the main array replaced the need for any Core Formation Methods aimed at mortals. The mysterious threads were a welcome bonus that would increase his efficiency.

This level of customization was generally not provided but rather a benefit of having accumulated so much Mana. Cultivators would undoubtedly get similar benefits if they reached the fourteenth echelon. Perhaps the Perennial Vastness would even adjust the Time Dilation, allowing them to form their cores under the true sky.

The final two ancillary arrays had a slightly different purpose than the first three. Their function wasn't to refine Void Treasures but rather to take him through the first hurdle of his Core Formation; setting up a stable nucleus. Thanks to this setup, Zac only needed to focus on adding treasures correctly and fusing the essences provided by the refinement arrays.

Zac had even modified the arrays using his accumulated knowledge from [Cosmic Forge]. They were still mostly the Perennial Vastness' design, but the energy they produced would now be a bit more familiar to him. Obviously, adding the theories of [Essence Union] into the arrays would have been even better, but Zac felt the current setup good enough to accomplish his goals.

The two swirls of Life and Death inside his Duplicity Core wouldn't last forever, so Zac sat down on a shimmering prayer mat. The movement made Zac grimace with pain. He'd kept a frantic pace since making his move on the splinter, and it was only now that he'd stopped that he fully realized the state he was in.

Since he last seized a set of remnants, he'd evolved his Draugr heritage and cultivated the [Void Vajra Sublimation]. His soul was stronger too, having crossed a whole stage thanks to the Moss Crystals,

something that would normally have taken a century. All that work, yet it wasn't enough to fully nullify the damage the remnants wrought on one's body.

As usual, Zac's body and Soul Aperture were filled with hairline cracks in gold and grey, especially between his head and shoulders. This aspect wasn't that bad, though. The remnants had been given little time to leave a mark on his body. The cracks wouldn't affect his core formation and should disappear in a week or two.

The bigger problem was the large amounts of Creation and Oblivion inside his Soul Spirals. They had frantically swallowed energy to protect the cores, and they hadn't spat much of it back out when Zac formed the Glimpse of Chaos. Now, it remained like a double-edged sword. The energy would come in handy one way or another. Even if he didn't need to use it, it would still speed up his Soul Cultivation.

However, this wasn't purified energy like what was released from the prison seals. The energy had been separated from its source but still contained the remnants' immortal will. He'd have to keep his guard up and not let it influence him. Apart from that, his Soul Cores were slightly damaged, but he could still extract 60-70% of their power.

The real damage had been wrought by the Glimpse of Chaos. He'd intentionally only used five Chaos Motes this time, just one more than when he broke out of the Orom World. It certainly wasn't his limit, but it had still left his body in a state of disarray. His pathways were damaged, as were his cells and the [Thousand Lights Avatar].

None of it was lethal or something that would cause lasting damage. The problem came from the fact it created a general imbalance in his body. Energy was more difficult to control, and multiple leaks affected its composition. The turbulent energy was like a stormy sea, and sending tendrils of Mental Energy to his Duplicity Core left them weakened and less agile.

Most wouldn't even consider starting their Core Formation unless they were in perfect condition, both body and mind. Zac would obviously have preferred being fully healed before starting, but it wasn't meant to be. His road had never been a straight one where everything went exactly according to plan. Why start now?

He was a scrapper. Forcibly pulling through with his body a mess was where he excelled. Zac swallowed a mix of healing pills as he got to work. Three boxes appeared before him, each sealed by dense layers of arrays. They contained the materials that would form his nucleus, and successfully dealing with the complex energies they contained was the next hurdle that needed to be crossed. And that needed finesse.

As much as Zac wanted, he couldn't just chew the treasures and swallow them. He first needed to refine the materials into something that could be used as the nucleus of a core.

Zac's hands moved in perfect harmony with the endless number of simulations he'd performed over the past years. First, he took out the [Warstone], and his heart surged with vigor from being buffeted by the crystallized essence of Conflict in his hand.

Conflict was the underpinning concept of his path and the first Dao he encountered. It was also the universal truth that had shaped his understanding of the Multiverse. His unusual introduction to the

System had pitted him against the Gwyllgi Alpha in a roll for survival, but that was just the beginning. Fighting the Barghest outside his camper had been the start of his bloody road toward supremacy.

He'd been fighting since day one, even seizing the titles for being the first to slay a beast in the new order forced upon Earth. Conflict had been a constant companion, molding him and pushing him forward. Now, it would become the first piece of his core.

Zac took out the Omnitool and began carving a series of lines across the stone. Each added line released immensely refined truths of War into the surroundings. A lot of ambient energy had already accumulated, and the [Warstone] turned the environment into a replica of his cave back home. Of course, be it energy or insights, the quality here far exceeded the setup on Earth.

Conflict, Life, and Death fought and raged, but Zac only felt comfort from the disturbance. You could call the clamor the natural expression of his Daos, something he didn't get to see in his mansion here in the Perennial Vastness. It felt like coming home and only helped him enter an optimal state of mind.

The rays of War emitted a mottled mix of truths, some echoing his Branch of the War Axe while others didn't. As Zac added more engravings to the stone, the leaking aura started to shift.

Away from his path.

The main reason the treasure needed to be engraved was to prepare it for processing and refinement, but it wasn't Zac's only goal. He had spent the better part of a decade working on his Omnitool and [Cosmic Forge], all so that he could create a better core more attuned to his Dao. Part of his effort could be seen in the mysterious patterns added to the [Warstone].

It was impossible to remold the Supreme Treasure into something fully harmonized with his Branch of the War Axe. He wasn't confident even [Essence Union] would allow such a great transformation without destroying what made the [Warstone] unique. However, his proficiency in [Cosmic Forge] allowed him to nudge things slightly in this favor.

Zac intentionally targeted the pieces unsuitable for his core, detaching their spiritual threads from the rest of the treasure. It was these pieces of spirituality that had begun leaking from the treasure. Such a crude approach would irrevocably destabilize the Supreme Treasure since he neither had the time nor skill to use [Cosmic Extraction] the intended way. In this case, it didn't matter.

The [Warstone] needed to be dismantled and reforged, so there was no point in keeping it stable in its current form. Of course, Zac couldn't go too far. If the treasure's unique spirituality collapsed, the [Warstone] would be no better for his core than some random raw attuned energies.

It was a delicate balancing act where you removed as many unneeded aspects as possible without getting too greedy. Zac finished up the pattern, which meant the timer had begun. It was impossible to say for certain, but Zac estimated he had around a minute before the [Warstone] would detonate like a bomb. The refinement pattern would have destabilized the treasure on its own, but it would have lasted thrice as long if not for Zac's meddling.

He gingerly placed the treasure on the Nucleus Array powered by Conflict, and an immense pressure contained the energy within. Seeing it stabilizing under pressure, Zac infused his will into a control rune.

A deluge of Dao and Energy, refined by Mount Illumination and the Dao thread, poured into the small stone. It started vibrating, but it had no problem taking on the accumulated energy in the tapestry.

Of course, it would also push it toward destabilizing, so Zac had to work quickly. The Dao of Conflict was rapidly being drained from the surroundings, and the imbalance only increased when Zac opened the second box and released a gust of Life and Death. They joined the waiting energies, forming a miniature version of the Calamity above his head. Small explosions created a smattering backdrop, but Zac barely registered it after confirming arrays and Dao threads had no problems withstanding the commotion.

His full focus was on the twinned crystals of the [Calamity Core], Life and Death trapped in an embrace—the remaining two-thirds of his Dao.