

## The Fall 1056

### [Chapter 1056 - Uncertainty into Truth](#)

The pressure the Core Formation Array levied on the treasures was immense, and they sporadically released bursts of energy that shook the [Hollow Core]. It almost looked like they were venting to sustain the compression. But there was no venting to be had. The energy was forced right back into the materials after wreaking havoc, leading to a volatile cycle. The Core Formation Array also squeezed the two blobs together, and Zac needed to get to work before they were fused in a way that would affect his plans.

Zac controlled the Mental Energy tools to begin molding the blobs of Conflict and Life, relieved to find the surgical tools mostly unaffected by the gravitational force. The refined [Calamity Core] and [Warstone] were very responsive, like putty. There was one problem, however; he had no way to interact with the deathly half of the [Calamity Core] in his human form.

His Life- and Conflict-attuned core formation tools were blocked when trying to pass through the Death-attuned half of the [Calamity Core], but they couldn't mold or move it at all. It lived its own life, changing shape based on pressure and the movements of the other two materials.

Similarly, he'd lost his connection with the tools filled with his Branch of the Pale Seal the moment they entered the Duplicity Core. They were also transformed by the mysterious quantum state that influenced all Death in the core. But that was fine. He would start the process in his human form and then swap over to his Draugr side.

The pressure was too great to form his core next to the two spheres, greatly increasing the difficulty. However, it was the pressure that kept the energies contained and the materials malleable. If he turned off the Main Array, the materials would rapidly cool and harden. Since that wasn't an option, Zac used the tendrils to force the two materials to spin while pressing against each other.

From there, he extracted a piece of material from each blob, like string pulled from spools. He quickly pushed them together, forming a simple braid before it was crushed between the rolling spheres. The braid emerged significantly more compressed on the other side and stuck to the [Warstone]'s surface while the blobs kept spinning.

Zac worked in tandem, adding a few more sections of Conflict to the braid while preparing half a braid on the other sphere. When the two sides drew close, he fused them just before they were crushed again. He was using gravitational force and the spinning treasures to create a makeshift roll press, a technique only possible when having surgical tools to assist the formation.

The more condensed the nucleus was, the stabler it would become. Each cycle would fuse the materials and arrange the preliminary connections in the Cosmic Core's center. A surge of energy warned that the materials wouldn't come together without a fight, and Zac was forced to give up a cycle as the braid released a tremendous shockwave of intermixed energy.

A large section of his budding creation was damaged, undoing most of his work in one go. Zac knew this was the uphill battle any mortal would face, especially one wanting to create such a complex core. He salvaged what could be saved and let the rest rejoin the spinning blobs as he extracted new strings of matter.

Thirty minutes passed as the super-condensed nugget grew bigger and bigger, where every layer was earned after multiple setbacks. The Death-attuned energies were unsurprisingly the source of the biggest headache. The growing ball of yarn was filled with uneven spots of Death that had been dragged inside by the process, only some of it intentionally. The nucleus was roughly 60% in line with his blueprint, and every eruption came with the risk of pushing that number even lower.

Not being in control of one-third of the matter going into the nucleus created a lot of difficulties. Zac did what he could to indirectly influence the uncontrollable half of the [Calamity Core]. He intentionally created empty pockets between Life and Conflict where Death squeezed inside. He also created temporary blockades when too much death was about to be pulled into the roll press.

It was these unbalanced pieces that were the cause of most of the energy eruptions. Not much time had passed, yet he'd already lost count of the number of explosions the [Hollow Core] had been forced to absorb. Zac managed to avoid some of the disasters, but most didn't even give him a chance to react. His Mental Tendrils were repeatedly shredded, forcing Zac to expend energy reforming them.

During this time, there were no signs of [Void Heart] releasing the missing piece of the puzzle.

It was for the best. While getting his hand on the refined Void Energy would be one less worry, it was liable to complicate the process. He had no idea how much control he'd be able to exert over the Void Energy, especially with the Core Formation Array unable to help.

If he could build an operational base on the other three materials first, he would simply need to push the Void into the "empty space," similar to how he used his Dao Molds. Of course, the space wasn't actually empty. While the models of his blueprint looked porous, that was just because it was impossible to properly express the Quantum States of his core in three-dimensional space.

In reality, he needed to infuse the Void Energy into the untouchable Quantum Death in his human form, then repeat the process with Life as a Draugr. And since he had no idea what that infusion would lead to, he felt it a good idea to finish as much work as possible beforehand. Another thirty minutes passed, which meant he'd crossed his estimate on the [Void Heart].

Still nothing.

Zac frowned, but he kept his mind and hands busy. First, he slowed down the rotation of the growing nucleus as much as he could while taking out three new treasure boxes. They were all top-tier materials of Life, Death, and Conflict, all sourced inside the Perennial Vastness. Zac added a set of engravings before placing them on their respective refinement array.

Just as Zac finished his work on the third treasure, a huge energy fluctuation shook his core. Zac urgently turned his focus back to the [Hollow Core], but it was too late. A whole section had destabilized, and Zac was forced to cut it off. He threw the piece into one corner while moving the nucleus to another, shielding it with Mental Energy.

A second later, the alloy shattered, and an unprecedented explosion raged through the [Hollow Core]. The immense pressure soon forced the energies back into the nucleus just like the energy from outside, but that wasn't the case for the physical material. Until now, the eruptions had only been energy, but this time material itself had exploded.

Zac could feel the section had lost its spirituality and could only extract the fragments from the [Hollow Core] with his mental tendrils. That section was gone, and he suddenly had less material to work with. Worse, they lost some of their spirituality in the explosion. Zac sighed, but he could only extract new material to patch up the damage.

Meanwhile, the three new treasures began absorbing the ambient Dao from the Dao Tapestries on the Dao Platform. Zac kept the absorption speed to a minimum as he continued his work on the nucleus, adding more and more with every revolution of the roll press. When finished, the nucleus would form a working miniature model of his core, so it would hopefully stabilize the energy flow somewhat.

The treasures sank into the refinement array fifteen minutes later, just before they risked destabilizing. With his full focus back on the core, Zac didn't lose any more material. The explosions continued, though, like incessant solar flares that refused to relent. But the nucleus also grew more compact, to the point the innermost regions were forcibly stabilized.

It took a full 95 minutes, but Zac eventually managed to fuse all the matter from the [Warstone] and [Calamity Core] into an almost perfectly spherical blob of alloy. Zac's soul trembled from the effort, having been forced to constantly split his consciousness into 20 threads to maximize efficiency.

Constantly reforming the surgical tendrils also came at a cost, and Zac said a silent prayer of good health for Mossy. If not for the living planet's Moss Crystals, he'd never have managed to evolve his soul by this point. And without a Three Fates soul, he wasn't even sure if he would have endured the process. A mortal forming a core this complex was possibly unprecedented.

Unfortunately, the nucleus still only looked like 60% of what it should have. If Zac began channeling energy through this thing, it'd quickly go from a Cosmic Core into a nuclear warhead. Still, Zac was happy with his efforts and moved on to stage two. Mental Threads entered the pathways of Life and Conflict and began exerting pressure to expand some sections and move others.

Manipulating the inner structure of the nucleus like this made its energy even more volatile, and he was forced to reform the Mental Tendrils twice as often from the constant explosions. At least the blob gradually moved closer to what it should look like. Zac was beginning to run low on Mental Energy even when liberally using Soul Crystals, so he was eventually forced to supplement with Soul Recovery Pills.

Each subsequent pill would provide less than the one before, but what could he do? He'd known this part would be rough, even if he admittedly hadn't expected the eruptions to be this frequent after being calmed by the Chaos Motes. Zac guessed it was unavoidable when working with immense energy and great pressure. As for the [Void Heart] taking its sweet time? Zac couldn't do anything about it, so he kept working on what he could actually affect.

It took him a full hour to improve the nucleus to 75% similarity with the blueprint, at which point progress drastically slowed down. There was only so much you could do to fix the problems caused by Death without actually touching it, so Zac infused some energy into the Duplicity Core itself.

Life and Death inverted, and the dormant tendrils filled with his Branch of the Pale Seal woke up. The previously inaccessible black crystal of the [Calamity Core] became fully malleable, allowing Zac to continue his work. Finally having access to the Death-attuned side drastically sped up progress, but it still took another hour until he reached 90% precision.

Shifting back to human let him add some finishing touches, pushing that number to an impressive 95%. The last 5% was just impossible to solve without being able to manipulate all three elements simultaneously. Besides, his soul was utterly drained by that point. He wouldn't have the strength to deal with the energy bursts if he kept pushing it.

There were no critical errors in its appearance, just minor inefficiencies, and that problem should solve itself. Dao had a natural state of balance, which could be glimpsed from the patterns often appearing on high-grade materials. As such, the Core Formation Array's constant pressure would make the materials move toward equilibrium as they condensed.

There was not much left for Zac to do at this point but keep watch and recover. The nucleus made Zac think of his earliest blueprints, and it looked as stable as could be. Few low-grade cultivators would be able to spot anything wrong with the nucleus, but it was built on a lie. Anyone with the slightest insights into the paradoxical nature of the Peak of Chaos would know that Zac's solution shouldn't work.

And it didn't.

Zac had kept his mind occupied over the past hours, but it was time to face facts. His estimates on the [Void Heart] were off, and not by a small degree. Meanwhile, the lingering unity of Chaos was starting to dissipate. The imperfection of his low attainment in the Dao tainted the perfected version of Life and Death, and seeds of discord disrupted the balance inside the [Hollow Core].

It wasn't enough to destabilize the nucleus, but it was just a matter of time.

The radiant light from the agitated materials had also started to wane. The nucleus was losing energy. If anything, it was the opposite. New energy entered the [Hollow Core] every second whether he liked it or not, and everything squeezed into the small sphere in its center. Adding new energy was also what kept the nucleus moldable, like stoking a fire.

Even then, too much time had passed, and the materials were hardening. Certainly, the Supreme Treasures had been indelibly transformed by the process, but they couldn't remain in this state. It was the same as with crafting or working on skill fractals. You could only modify a fractal for so long until it solidified.

Core Formation wasn't a process where you could start and stop at will, especially not mortals. He eventually needed to start adding the next set of materials. Wait too long, and the second layer wouldn't properly connect with the nucleus. It would create a hidden weakness, where the Cosmic Core suddenly cracked when too much energy coursed through its pathways.

That's why he'd already thrown the next set of Materials onto the refinement arrays. The general refinement arrays took longer than the specialized arrays Zac used before, and he needed to have the materials on hand before the nucleus solidified. Of course, that depended on Zac making it that far; the nucleus was living on borrowed time.

[Void Heart] was almost three hours late in providing the final piece of the puzzle, and Zac's worry only grew as another hour passed. Zac had initially considered just using one Chaos Mote to avoid damaging his pathways too much, but he was infinitely thankful he had been a bit greedy. If anything, he felt a pang of regret he hadn't opted for a few more. Of course, that might have resulted in his soul not enduring the unexpectedly rough process.

He'd passed the time using his [Undying Mark] and healing pills to fix some of the damage to his body and Soul Aperture, and he'd performed maintenance on his damaged pathways and [Thousand Lights Avatar]. Later, he swapped back to his human form to use [Surging Vitality] and a second batch of pills.

Eventually, Zac reached the point he hoped he'd never have to see. The Mental Threas moved like surgical knives and cut off a small section. He tried to expel it from his body, but neither hatch nor [Hollow Core] allowed the release of such energy-rich material. Instead, he could only repeat his previous maneuver. A huge explosion rocked the hidden space within the Duplicity core, and Zac dragged out the broken pieces soon after with a sense of defeat.

Losing a couple of pieces of the nucleus wasn't the end of the world. The damage could be repaired, and it only meant a little bit more work when he needed to upgrade the core in the future. But the fact he couldn't maintain stability even with a fully formed nucleus meant he was out of time. Every subsequent explosion would destabilize the nucleus further, creating a negative spiral that would quickly go out of control.

Zac fought exhaustion while infusing his full will into [Hollow Core], but it felt like he was trying to right a sinking ship by throwing water overboard with a bucket. One explosion after another rocked the [Hollow Core], and it felt like a countdown toward Zac's demise. Indecision gnawed at him as he desperately tried to maintain the status quo, his eyes constantly darting to the ring holding his Void Treasures.

Then, a deep thump shook the whole platform, and Zac almost cried with relief. [Void Heart] had given him a scare, but it was finally done. A stream of mysterious Void Energy shot out of the Hidden Node, looking like a thundercloud of alien runes. The patterns didn't resemble anything from Ultom and seemed completely separate from the systems used in this era. Zac wasn't even certain whether it was physical or spiritual as it moved through his body.

Deciphering those formations might be key to finding clues to the Void, but this wasn't the time or place. His cells were already trying to drag runes out of the clouds, and the nucleus was teetering on the brink of collapse. Zac captured the cloud with a net of Mental Energy and dragged it toward his Duplicity Core with all speed he could muster.

Meanwhile, he opened his cells wide and supplied large amounts of Void Energy. The energy entered the storm, slightly diluting its immense energy to exchange quality for quantity. The cloud was too intense, overpowering the auras from the other three elements. If he added Void of Death more powerful than the Dao of Life, he'd fail to reach a state of equilibrium.

Zac stopped the churning cloud right outside the hatch, where he split it in half after a short deliberation. He considered adding Branches of the Pale Seal and Kalpataru into the halves but eventually decided against it. He shouldn't need to add any more Dao into the Void. The Quantum Death fused with modified Void should result in Void of Death. Adding actual Dao would likely ruin the process.

It was impossible to say whether he was making the right call or whether his idea would even work. He could only put his faith in Ultom's impartments and years of effort as he made the plunge. Zac could already sense that another piece of the nucleus was about to destabilize, so he pushed one of the clouds through the hatch. Mental tendrils turned into a blur as they split the cloud into two dozen streams that entered the nucleus from every direction.

Zac didn't have to wait long to see the result. His triumphant roar echoed through the mountain range as the Void Energy effortlessly entered the Quantum Death, and the cloud was rapidly consumed. It worked! Void really was the key. However, the Void Energy was certainly not the calming balm he'd expected. Anywhere it entered, the surroundings would quake as the Void disrupted the lingering peace brought by Chaos.

For a moment, it really looked like Zac had built a bomb rather than a core, but that didn't mean he stopped infusing the nucleus. There was no going back now. Either he finished the job, or he'd blow himself and the surrounding mountains to kingdom come. It only took a few seconds, but it felt like an eternity as he desperately tried to apply the Void to every nook and cranny.

Then, the shaking stopped, and the energies turned docile after hours of madness. Zac looked on with bated breath until it seemed like his vantage shifted. Zac felt like he was looking at one of those images that changed motif depending on the angle from which you looked. A moment ago, the nucleus had felt like a fake core, like someone had slapped a new coat of paint on a rotting house.

Now, it looked perfect—an Evolutionary Core holding the shadow of Inexorability.

Well, almost perfect. Seven imperfections marred the complex structure after he'd been forced to excise the unstable sections, creating some disturbances in the energy flow. However, that level of damage was no worse than him getting a couple of cuts. He'd still be able to fight in that state, and his Cosmic Core would still work with issues this small.

Part of Zac just wanted to look at his creation and marvel, but he had to keep going. He swapped to his Draugr form and began the process anew with the other half of the Void Cloud. Inverting the core had destabilized it again, but it having completed one half made it much sturdier. Even then, Zac filled the sections with extreme meticulousness until a complete Inexorable Core was born. Zac just sat there looking at his creation for a few minutes with an immense sense of satisfaction.

Fifteen years it'd taken him to reach this point. Fifteen years of struggle, wracking his brain for a solution. A solution that would prove to the world they were wrong. That it was possible to form a core with Life and Death. Yet, even after all his preparations and guidance, Zac still wasn't sure whether he was chasing a wild fantasy or if he was really onto something.

Today, uncertainty finally turned into truth.