

The Fall 1059

[Chapter 1059 - The Path Forward](#)

Zac's body was absolutely wrung dry after enduring the tribulation, yet he felt like a million bucks as he dragged himself toward the Nexus Node. He only briefly stopped, looking hesitantly at his core. It had shrunk to two-thirds of its original size, emitting a condensed aura of power. However, it was also covered in small cracks, and it still released the occasional burst of unstable energy.

The insides of the Duplicity Core were the only spot that hadn't been drained by his Hidden Node and the Duplicity Core, and his core had just finished rooting it all out. Zac knew picking a class with a damaged core wasn't an issue, but should he wait a bit longer? It would give him some time to recover.

No, that wasn't an option. A deep rumble shifted his insides as yet another mountain crumbled in the distance. The Duplicity Core was insatiable, but Zac wasn't sure how much it could take. It had stopped its transformation while waiting for him to pick a class, but what if he delayed too long? The Technocrat invention had already provided enough surprises. He didn't want to wait to find out if some fail-safes were installed to avoid overloading the Duplicity Core with energy.

Better he pick now before his mother somehow picked for him.

The Nexus Node was different from the one he had back home. For one, it was only the size of a football, making it feel like a portable version. The dense golden scripts across its surface proved it was anything but simple, though. Between the runes and the stable aura it emitted, Zac even suspected it was far superior to the normal ones he'd encountered thus far.

This was the moment he'd been eagerly expecting, and his heart beat with anticipation as he placed his hand on the smooth surface. This was the last step. Having already endured the tribulation of the Boundless Heaven, the System wouldn't target him with another trial of its own. Only cultivators within Heaven's Path would have to deal with the tests he'd endured when entering E-grade.

Zac had originally been disappointed by that fact. Entering Hegemony would simultaneously attack you with all three types of tribulations, but so what? All aspects of his cultivation were beyond ordinary, be it his body, soul, or heart. Conversely, the experience had uncovered some sealed memories of his past. This time, he wouldn't get such an opportunity. Now, Zac was only relieved. The process and tribulation had left him in a far worse state than he'd expected. He just wanted to get things over with now so that he could rest.

There was actually a small risk you wouldn't have any options waiting for you if the System didn't deem you worthy. But that was quite rare and generally reserved for those who had cheated their way into Hegemony, completely relying on pills or treasures. If you managed to form a core based on your Daos, you'd generally have at least one class waiting for you.

Zac felt a pulse enter his body, and it was suddenly like the Duplicity Core had entered a Quantum State as it hid from the presence. Zac could feel the Nexus Node investigate his pathways and core, and a screen soon appeared.

Core Formation Successful

Design: 87% unique.

Imperfections: Low (10-100).

Evaluation: Middle Quality, S-grade Energy Capacity, S-grade Potential, S-grade level of Innovation.

Zac hadn't expected to get a report card, but he was flush with pride at the evaluation. Besides the middle quality, which Zac had already known about, every evaluation was top-notch. Capacity and potential were the most important ones. The former meant he'd be able to draw far more power from his core than normal Hegemons, and the latter undoubtedly meant potential for upgrades.

These two being valued at S-level meant there were absolutely no problems taking his core all the way to Monarchy. Zac was the least surprised over the S-grade Innovation evaluation. His core was unique across the Multiverse. If his core didn't warrant S-grade, none did. However, Zac felt that particular evaluation was more for the System than himself.

The line reminded Zac of his time in the Technocrat Research Base, where getting the Pathstrider-title marked him for further training. S-grade Innovation felt like being branded an excellent experimental subject, which probably meant the System would throw more trouble your way to nurture you. Then again, that wasn't anything new, so Zac didn't mind too much.

The System seemed to be tabulating the results before showing his class options. Each second felt like an eternity, but Zac breathed in relief when the screen finally updated. It was official; he wasn't one of the unlucky few. Zac hadn't been worried his Daos or accomplishments would be insufficient, but rather that his odd core would make it difficult for the System to generate suitable classes.

He'd been tormenting himself for nothing. There was not one, but three choices available to him.

Base Attributes Per Level:

Epic: 100 / 150 / 200.

Arcane: 115 / 170 / 225.

[Option 1]

Name: [D-Epic] Arcadia's Champion.

Fixed Attributes: Strength +300 / 450 / 600, Vitality: +150 / 225 / 300.

Free Attributes: +100 / 150 / 200.

Even Paradise needs a champion, an unrelenting storm of violence.

Name: [D-Epic] Desolation's Warden.

Fixed Attributes: Strength +250 / 375 / 500, Endurance +150 / 225 / 300, Wisdom +75 / 100 / 150.

Free Attributes: +75 / 125 / 150.

Bind them to your calamity. Pave your path with blood and bones. Emerge stronger.

[Option 2]

Name: [D-Epic] Primeval Edge.

Fixed Attributes: Strength +250 / 375 / 500, Dexterity +75 / 100 / 150, Vitality +200 / 300 / 400.

Free Attributes: +50 / 75 / 100.

As Life was born, so was struggle. Become the primeval blade, reborn through battle.

Name: [D-Epic] Predestination's Judge.

Fixed Attributes: Strength +275 / 400 / 550, Dexterity +50 / 75 / 100, Endurance +200 / 300 / 400.

Free Attributes: +50 / 75 / 100.

As Death was born, so was struggle. Become the judge's blade, the cessation of all.

[Option 3]

Name: [D-Arcane] Evolutionary Precursor

Fixed Attributes: Strength +300 / 450 / 600, Dexterity +100 / 150 / 200, Vitality +150 / 225 / 300

Free Attributes: +100 / 150 / 200

Progress through struggle, future seized, not given.

Name: [D-Arcane] Inexorable Apostle

Fixed Attributes: Strength +325 / 475 / 650, Dexterity +75 / 125 / 150, Endurance +150 / 225 / 300.

Free Attributes: 100 / 150 / 200

Explosive stillness, fate become nourishment to your ascent.

The vortices around him were a reminder his time was limited, but Zac still went over his options word by word. There were not many surprises after having spent years inside the Perennial Vastness—the gaps in his knowledge that came with being a frontier cultivator had been filled long ago. The only point of interest in the basic information was how the data was presented.

Like with the nodes, his Base Attribute gain had been separated from the class options. Normally, the text wasn't presented this way, and Zac guessed it resulted from the System adjusting to his unique situation. The biggest takeaway was that he'd unlikely get two sets of base attributes, just like how he only got attributes for opening nodes once.

Neither was Zac sure how it'd work in practice. There was no clear event per level, like when nodes were opened. His core would stay the same until it was time to upgrade it to the Middle stage. Each level would just let him tap into a bit more of its power. Cultivators would slowly refine their cores when practicing their manuals, but that only affected their quality.

Would the Base Attributes be awarded when one of his sides gained a level, or did both sides need to reach that step? Or was it perhaps impossible for him to level only one side at a time, considering his Quantum Core relied on a state of balance? Zac guessed he'd find out soon enough after gaining his first

levels. Gaining levels with pills was far more inefficient in the D-grade, but he should be able to get a couple after his core stabilized.

Not getting two sets of Base Attributes was a disappointment, but in no way a surprise. After all, he only had the one core, even if it was unique. He'd held onto a lingering hope his Quantum Core's dual states would provide dual bonuses, but it looked like it wasn't meant to be. Zac didn't feel he was losing out. If anything, his situation could be considered better in the D-grade.

A normal Epic E-grade cultivator gained 25 base attributes, 10 free points, and around 70 class attributes per level at the late stage, for a grand total of 230 raw attributes per level. Looking at the numbers, an early Hegemon gained almost five times that. From there, every stage would increase the gain by 50%, meaning a Late Hegemon gained double the attributes an early Hegemon did.

In other words, a Hegemon's attribute advantage against E-grade cultivators wasn't as pronounced as an E-grade cultivator's advantage over an F-grade cultivator. Neither did attributes scale as well through Hegemony, only doubling compared to the E-grade's tripling. It was the same with Earthly Daos, meaning the attribute difference wasn't as noticeable between the ranks.

In this case, Zac's advantage came from the distribution of attributes. Going through the E-grade was to prepare your body for cultivation and reform it with Cosmic Energy. As such, it provided large comprehensive improvement to every aspect of your body with every node opened. In practice, this translated to two-thirds of the attributes being allocated when opening a node.

Only 33% of your attributes came from leveling your classes in the E-grade. This changed as you became a Hegemon. By this point, you'd stepped onto your path, or at least found a style suited to you. Hegemony leaned into your specialization, where you focused more on useful attributes while giving up on those who brought fewer benefits.

It was like Zac with his Intelligence and, to a lesser degree, Wisdom. He had over 4,000 Intelligence already, far more than even the greatest F-grade mages. But that barely helped him at all; it was essentially a dead attribute for him. The same was becoming increasingly true for his Wisdom. The strength of his soul and defenses against mental attacks mostly came from his [Nine Reincarnations Manual] rather than his attribute amplification.

The same held true for all cultivators. By the time you reached Hegemony, you were expected to shore up your weaknesses by relying on your strengths. Like Billy, who gained a skill to transform his Strength into explosive speed, making up for his lacking Dexterity. Similarly, you could use your Cosmic Core to power defensive treasures to protect your body and soul.

Focusing your attention on where it could be leveraged the most was more efficient. As such, half of your attributes would come from your class choice. For Zac, with his two classes, it meant a greater attribute superiority. Part of the advantage would be countered by D-grade Cultivation Manuals providing significantly stronger amplification, but it would still be noticeable.

Did that mean his advantage against the competition would only grow as he passed through the ranks? Both yes and no.

By raw numbers, Zac would be comparatively stronger the further he stepped through Hegemony. However, attributes weren't the only thing that mattered, and not just because of advantages like his

techniques. There were only three true bottlenecks in the D-grade, but each transformed your Cosmic Core. A Middle-stage core would hold roughly five times the energy of an Early-stage one, and the same was true further down the road.

In other words, a Peak Hegemon wielded over 100 times the Cosmic Energy as an Early Hegemon. If you had no way to leverage this and turn your vast sea of energy into strength, then your advantage wouldn't be that big. But through Skills, War Regalia, and various unique means, you could absolutely dominate the lower-stage Hegemons even if your attributes weren't that much higher.

That was an important distinction between Hegemony and the lower grades. Skills and equipment were linked to your core. You normally needed a Middle-stage Cosmic Core to power a Middle-proficiency skill, and the same was true for War Regalia. In return, these skills and tools would channel far more energy, which meant greater offensive and defensive power.

Against Hegemons in Zecia, where most didn't have regalia or the ability to upgrade their skills, Zac was confident in dealing with almost anyone by the time he entered Middle Hegemony. Against well-trained and well-equipped Hegemons from the Multiverse Heartlands? That was another story altogether. The Multiverse was divided between the haves and have-nots, and Hegemony was no different.

Since the attribute distribution provided little new information, Zac focused more on his class choices. Only being presented with three options was a step down from his previous breakthrough when he got the full set of five. Of course, it made sense.

Back in the F-grade, he'd still been finding his way. His power came from a mottled assortment of opportunities that had yet to crystallize into a cohesive system, let alone a path. Today, his understanding of cultivation was leagues ahead, and he had already picked the direction he wanted to take. There was no confusion, no hesitation—only faith and determination.

What would be the point of the System offering a bunch of Classes that would diverge from his path? In reality, the screen presented Zac with a different choice; did he want to confirm his path, or did he want to keep his options open?

Confirming his path meant getting the Arcane Classes, which came with higher attributes and more advanced forms of nurturing. But it also meant his future would grow narrow. It would be almost impossible for him to change course like he had multiple times in the E-grade. He would instead enter the refinement stage of his cultivation, where he slowly removed imperfections while moving toward the peak of his path.

The Arcane Classes, Evolutionary Precursor and Inexorable Apostle, were clearly modeled after his stances, which were the truest expression of his path. The flavor text reflected his understanding of Life and Death, where Life represented possibility and Death represented dominion. One broke the chains of fate, while the other seized control over fate.

The Epic Classes represented freedom. Who knew what the future held? Perhaps there would be something inside Ultom that completely threw his path on its head, making him strive for something even greater. It would mean a smaller boost of attributes, but that wasn't that big of a deal. He was already getting far more attributes than anyone else by having two classes.

The two sets of Epic options were quite straightforward. The first duo, Arcadia's Champion and Desolation's Warden, seemed to be straight upgrades of his current classes. They would add more of the same, their attribute distribution almost identical to Edge of Arcadia and Fetters of Desolation. Picking this choice would likely provide the smoothest transition, and he would be able to hit the ground running.

Primeval Edge and Predestination's Judge moved his classes toward his path without fully stepping onto it. Its attribute distribution better aligned with his Daos and the set of Arcane Classes. It was the best of both worlds, adapted to his style without locking him in like an Arcane class.

Three options, all with their own advantages, and none with any direct flaws like many of his options last time. No matter what he picked, he would be well equipped for the upcoming war and the trial inside the Left Imperial Palace. Yet for Zac, it wasn't a difficult choice—he'd decided the second he saw the Classes.

He was going with the Arcane Classes.

His path had become an indelible part of his very being. Zac would see this road to the end, and he felt the safety net of an Epic Class would distract rather than help him. So Zac only took 20 seconds to enter his Void Self-state, ensuring he wasn't acting hastily or out of greed. No, picking Evolutionary Precursor and Inexorable Apostle was the right path forward.

Whether it was long-term potential or access to the quick powerups needed for Ultom, Arcane was simply the best option. After all, Arcane wasn't the end of the road; it was just the starting point of the next one. There were even higher-class rarities above, but those required you to confirm your path first.

The latest you could do so was when you confirmed your Dao and became a Divine Monarch, but there were disadvantages to waiting that long. The longer you delayed the switch, the longer you would be stuck in the lower tier of class rarities. Picking Arcane now meant he could upgrade the rarity when forming his inner world and once more when becoming a Divine Monarch.

Doing so was exceedingly difficult, and Arcane Classes were by far the most common rarity, even among Autarchs. But so what? Reaching the goal might be impossibly difficult, but since when had cultivation been easy? You had to dare grasp for the stars if you wanted a chance at rising above.

A surge of energy filled Zac's body as he provided the Nexus Node with his answer, this one provided by the cosmos itself rather than through the forceful extraction of the surrounding spirituality. He saw mysterious runes sink into the channels he'd arduously crafted while waves of change rippled through his pathways. Fractals expanded and grew more exquisite, where ten patterns became one hundred to accommodate greater energies and deeper Daos.

The transformation of his core and pathways were soon mirrored on the Duplicity Core, confirming Zac's suspicion it was waiting for his Class choice to finish the transformation. It formed a mysterious resonance with the evolving core, and Zac gasped as he finally sensed a weak connection to his Cosmic Core. It felt like a bottomless ocean of pure power, right there for the taking.

However, two discordant pulses threw Zac out of his marvelous state, and unbelievable pain suddenly wracked his body.

A storm of foreign energy had appeared in his chest, and Zac felt like he could hear the whirring clatter of millions of gears turning as his whole body seemed to phase in and out of reality. The System was still imprinting his core at full steam, but Zac barely noticed it as he desperately tried to understand what was happening. It wasn't difficult to find the culprit.

The Kayar-Elu was not yet done meddling with his breakthrough.