

The Fall 897

Chapter 897: Void Vajra Sublimation

The voice carried a sense of exhaustion and helplessness, like the speaker had been forced to observe a Sisyphean undertaking for an eternity. It came from everywhere at once, and Zac could hear it with his ears, soul, and heart. Suddenly hearing someone speak in this secluded place almost made Zac's heart leap out of his throat, but he never got a chance to pinpoint the voice's origin.

The two sentences had become the catalyst for a series of changes. The figurine released a massive pulse before crumbling into a pile of dark-grey dust on the altar. Zac was thankfully unscathed by the burst, but he found reality slow to a crawl as the small planets in his soul ground to a halt. Just like last time, three shimmering lines appeared in his aperture, their radiant light seemingly containing all the answers in the universe.

Zac's mind had been thrown into chaos by the ominous message, and various theories were cropping up like weeds. But the familiar scene in his Soul Aperture brought him back to the present, and Zac forcibly pushed down the confusion as he focused on the task at hand. With everything except his thoughts frozen, he couldn't do anything about the mysterious messenger even if he wanted. So he might as well grasp the opportunity before worrying about cycles and chains.

Actually, it wasn't hard to put the matter aside. The moment the lights appeared in his mind, nothing else mattered. They were showering him with so many insights and impressions that it was nigh impossible to concentrate on anything else.

As planned, Zac immediately focused his attention on the [Void Vajra Sublimation] and the 81 expressions of the Void he had envisioned so as not to waste even a mote of Ultom's wisdom. Months of meditation and experimentation had led to this moment, and he almost felt like a student waiting for a verdict from their adviser.

Had he found a viable direction after the last piece of the seal illuminated the way forward, or had he walked down a blind alley in his search for a solution? Was that perhaps why he had found himself at an impasse back in the cave under the Undrusian Sea, where there was an invisible wall that had stopped him from progressing with his experiments any further?

The sweet suffering of having his brain filled with a million new ideas started anew, but this time they were built upon far sturdier foundations. He didn't just start where the previous epiphany had left off. Having a real and practical understanding of the original Body Tempering Method and the effects of Heart Cultivation allowed him to go much further than the intangible conceptualization of last time.

Zac felt something was building inside him, something earth-shattering as it diverged from conventional cultivation based on the Dao. His inspiration brought him further and further into the Void, where his answer waited for him, a solution that wouldn't force him to accede to the Sangha's worldview.

But it was too complex. To understand the Void was to understand all Dao, which was something Zac wasn't sure even Supremacies were able to accomplish. Even if he only needed a simplified method, the truths that Ultom showed him were too absolute, too overpowering that they threatened to damage his psyche and push his path off course.

Zac held on as he endlessly iterated, pushing the limits of what his Soul and 3000-odd Intelligence could withstand. For the first time since the Integration, he felt a bit regretful that he had essentially discarded the attribute that most improved one's computational speed. Then again, Zac wasn't so sure those kinds of boosts were applicable in this kind of situation.

And then it came to him.

A pop echoed out in Zac's mind as though the proverbial barrier preventing his understanding crumbled like it was a real thing. Zac felt like his whole being had been unclogged when it all dawned on him. There was no gradual buildup, no formation of one void expression at a time. All at once, eighty-one elusive dots were born, forming a circle in the middle of his chest.

Or rather, Zac pictured them like a pattern on his chest. These motes were neither tangible nor imaginary; they were focal points of his Heart Cultivation. No outsider would ever be able to see them, as they were more akin to emotions and mental states than pathways or fractals. But that didn't make them any less real.

They were real, and they were true. Utterly and inconceivably true.

Even in their rudimentary state, Zac could tell that they were not just something dragged out from Ultom's endless repository of data. They were specially made by him and for him, where Zac used the epiphany like a supercomputer for deriving their shapes. If anything, they felt familiar to the point it was a bit odd. Sensing the circle was like he was sensing himself.

A few seconds later, Zac understood what was going on. The dots reminded him of his bloodline. The three lines in his Soul Aperture had somehow connected the 'void' in his bloodline with the spatial Void he'd been thrown into a few times and the void-state of the Heart he had envisioned for his [Void Vajra Sublimation].

To this day, Zac didn't quite understand what the 'Void' in his name came from or if and how it related to the actual Void between dimensions. The visions of Karz didn't provide any clue either since his abilities were essentially the opposite of Zac's own. And since Karz lived in an era before the System, there weren't any blue prompts to shed light on the situation.

But seeing the eighty-one dots, Zac suddenly understood a few things, even if he lacked the understanding to delve further. The Void between dimensions was just one of many voids. The Void of Space, to be exact; a place utterly bereft of the Dao of Space. It was simply the most commonly known one since it had such an impact on the Multiverse.

Where any Dao existed, so did an opposing force, just like matter and antimatter. This should be the broader Void his bloodline referred to. And these dots represented the Void of Life. That was what he had been missing before when he tried to come up with mental images meant to replace the sutras; the connection between Heart and Life.

The Buddhist Sangha's understanding of the Dao of Life was encoded into the [Boundless Vajra Sublimation]. Only a similar type of understanding would allow Zac to swap out one part without making the whole thing collapse. This was the key to his own Body Tempering Method and perhaps to his bloodline as a whole.

The formation of the dotted circle on his chest was just the start. While Zac delved deeper into the meaning of the Void and its coexistence with the Dao and Void, the tiny dots started to transform as they grew small tendrils. They felt like sprouts emerging from seeds, but they formed complex patterns rather than roots.

As the seeds grew, so did Zac's comprehension of the Void and the Heart. The questions that had plagued him during his training were swept away, replaced by ironclad certainty. Even the mysterious interrelation between Life, Body, and Heart that the Buddhist Sangha had invented was exposed to the light; its secrets were laid bare for Zac to see.

Armed with the practical understanding and effects of reciting the chants, Zac came to a worrying realization. There were problems with the original version of the method, problems beyond the commonly known pathbreaking risk.

Being flush with the boundless knowledge of Ultom, Zac wasn't even confident he had been given the original version by Three Virtues any longer. Typically, it was hard to get a complete overview of the jam-packed memories imprinted in his mind, but now, the [Boundless Vajra Sublimation] felt like a tapestry for him to look at freely.

And it was clear as day; cultivating the original method was a surrender of the self, where the Heart would ultimately supplant the Soul. There was a distinct difference in this concept from the more commonly known risks of cultivating the Buddhist methods. The common understanding was that their methods were a double-edged sword.

Either you'd succumb and join the Sangha, or you would walk away with immense benefits. This was not the case, at least not with the manual he'd received. This was far more sinister. In essence, your consciousness would be locked away from your own body and turned into a spiritual battery to power the Vajra that your body had become.

On the outside, you would look like a converted monk who only had a Heart for buddha, when in reality, you'd be a prisoner for the rest of your days.

The moment you reached the third layer and reached what the method called 'Minor Sublimation,' it would be game over. Normally, any rational cultivator would notice something was wrong before reaching that point, but the Heart Cultivation of the [Boundless Vajra Sublimation] would chisel away your apprehensions and suspicions. Only by stopping at the second layer would you be safe, but that stage wouldn't give you the proper benefits of a Life-attuned body.

But now, all that had changed. Eventually, the dots stopped growing, leaving Zac with eighty-one unique sigils. His perception shifted, and even if time was still forced to a halt, he felt the small circle on his chest change into a hovering belt around his body. He couldn't actually see the sigil, but he felt them slowly rotating around him. Together, they formed a circle with a diameter of around three meters.

The moment the sigils appeared outside his body, a familiar rumble shook the sky. The Heavens had descended, and Zac was almost kicked out of his unique state from the shock. Was he about to get blasted by another Lightning Tribulation? Usually, Zac wouldn't mind, but he wasn't ready this time.

Thankfully, the pressuring presence receded just a moment later, like it had just doled out a warning before returning. Or had it been unable actually to pinpoint his location? Either case, Zac was incredibly

relieved, and he returned his attention to his [Void Vajra Sublimation]. Forming a working system with these Void Sigils was only the first step, even if it was the hardest one.

He needed to incorporate everything into the method if he wanted to use the Void Sigils for anything more than tempering his heart. From there, Zac methodically swapped out one piece of the technique after another, replacing boundlessness with void until a perfect system had been born. The lights in his soul had mostly dissipated by this point, but he didn't rush his work at all.

His memory contained all the layers of the [Boundless Vajra Sublimation], but Zac would rather finish the simpler ones at the beginning than risk any mistakes. An imperfection in the earlier layers of the method would create problems down the road, and it was better to get things right from the start. Like with the [Nine Reincarnations Manual], he would have to figure out the last layers when he got there.

Just as the lights were about to wink out, Zac finalized the third Layer of his [Void Vajra Sublimation], which allowed him to breathe out in relief. It was what he needed to reach the first significant breakthrough of the method and gain an actual Life-Attuned Constitution. From there, each layer would purify and strengthen his body further, with two more major checkpoints; 'Major Sublimation' and 'True Boundless Sublimation,' which Zac guessed would have to be renamed to True Void Sublimation.

And finally, the lights winked out, and Zac was brought down to reality where the marvels of the universe were out of grasp, where he once more was just a trifling E-grade cultivator mucking about in search of answers. Losing the connection to the lights of Ultom felt even rougher this time around. At least there were still two times to go, and if this round were any indication, each epiphany would contain the same amount of insights.

More importantly, he had actually accomplished what he set out to do – create a working Body Tempering Manual uniquely suited for him. It was a huge accomplishment that eluded even some ancient clans, yet he had managed to do it alone. Of course, without the help of the white light, he might never have accomplished it, but everyone who reached greater heights had a couple of unfathomable encounters under their belt.

The moment Zac was able to move again, he flashed away from the altar as [Verun's Bite] appeared in his hand. He wasn't overly surprised to find that there was no one around, though, no source to the voice from before. Zac's best guess was that the voice was a lingering impression, just like those images he'd seen for a moment before entering the temple.

Perhaps they were all the same; the ghosts, the person who had left the figurine in this temple, and the source of the voice. Perhaps, the voice wasn't even speaking to him but instead worked like a pre-recorded message. There was no way to know and no time to figure it out. There was nothing else of value in this temple, and it was time to go.

Zac saw how space had already started to unravel above the altar, meaning a breach was about to hit the temple. But just as Zac was about to exit the prayer hall, the eroded altar hummed before releasing a wave of energy. The breach was immediately rebuffed, and Zac was filled with a sense of tranquility and clarity while the outside world was muted.

It looked like the altar was an item with a similar function to [Mind's Eye Agate]. But even in its eroded state, the effect was orders of magnitudes greater. An odd sensation made Zac look inward, and he was

both surprised and delighted to see lines being added to more than one of his skills. In fact, most of his skills were evolving, proving just how powerful the altar was.

That was not to say it was all thanks to this temple. Many of his skills were long overdue for an upgrade, but his almost solitary focus on his technique and Soul during his time in the Orom World had put them on the backburner. After having been through two tremendous epiphanies and getting blessed by the altar, they were all bursting forth at once.

Zac was frozen in place, unable and unwilling to break this current state of comprehension. For a moment, it didn't feel like he was standing in a long-forgotten ruin in some pocket dimension. He was standing in a prayer hall where ancient sages had meditated on the mysteries of the universe.

A few minutes later, the process was over, and Zac glanced in the direction of the mountain range where Vai waited. After some hesitation, he ultimately turned around and walked back to the altar. It was still emitting that mysterious aura, and while his human side had received a slew of benefits, his Draugr side had not.

Since Zac had no idea what would wait for him inside the temple, he hadn't specified any time to the researcher. It shouldn't have been more than an hour since he left Vai in the cave, even if he felt as though decades had passed from how much he had comprehended. She should be fine with waiting a while longer.

And the same went for all the questions that had popped up with this breakthrough; the voice, the lingering resentment in the figurine, even the fact that the Buddhist Sangha might have made a play for his body. Of course, it was impossible to tell with someone like Three Virtues. He might have known Zac would be able to change it, or at least he wouldn't cultivate it blindly.

He might even have expected to be exposed, which might have forced Zac to visit the Sangha for a proper version. But now, all those questions would have to wait since there was no telling how long this mysterious effect would linger.

Soon, Zac once more stood in front of the altar, and he still couldn't understand what was so special about it. It looked like a regular piece of rock carved into a large block, lacking any spirituality. Even now, that hadn't changed. But it was indisputable that it had not only stabilized the breach in space but also turned the whole temple into a haven for cultivators.

Having decided, Zac's eyes turned abyssal black as his skin paled. It was the first time he had swapped to his undead form in a good long while, and it felt like reuniting with a friend more than anything. His time in the Twilight Ocean and the Orom had allowed him to become acquainted with his undead side properly, and it no longer felt like it was a special state or disguise.

It was as much him as his human side was, and Zac believed that feeling would only increase as he progressed further down his path.

While the altar's effect on its surroundings was amazing, it was a far cry from the epiphany. But it was perfect for Zac's purposes, and he smiled when another wave of inspiration began the moment the transition was complete. With these skill upgrades, he would have gained a comprehensive set of power-ups that covered almost every aspect of combat.

A few minutes later, the process was completed without a hitch. But Zac wasn't done there. Instead, he took out the Death-attuned Natural Treasure he'd saved for just this occasion, the treasure that could help upgrade skills. Between his two forms, there was one final holdout in his repertoire; [Vanguard of Undeath].

The other skills had all been upgraded by now, and with the recent burst of clarity, it had fallen even further behind. The temple had even provided sanctuary and an opportunity to fix the final missing link. He would be a fool not to go for it.