

The Fall 1008

[Chapter 1008 - Light of Azra](#)

'What do we do? WHAT DO WE DO?' Kalva's frantic voice rattled in Uthar's mind. 'This guy is too dangerous.'

Uthar's face was calm, but his heart drummed as he looked on as the severed link of the insane Draugr's coffin floated into the man's hand. Uthar realized he knew far too little about these undead creatures and their means. He only knew the Draugr was one of the leaders of the distant Undead Empire. But so what? They were the scions of an equally powerful faction, with both numbers and Mana on their side.

To think they'd sent an Eonic Seed to the Perennial Vastness. Didn't they have any core inheritances of their own?

Was there a way out of this mess? Losing Galvo was a hit to his prestige, but it didn't matter much. Uthar was already approaching his limits before the Mana Poison got too much, so his retainers weren't of much use anymore. This was supposed to be a final outing. If he managed to seize the [Calamity Core], he'd enter the ninth echelon and could turn his attention to Core Formation. So there was no irredeemable grudge between the two.

Uthar tried to glean anything from the man, but he got a sinking feeling as he saw the Draugr's attention shift from the severed chain in his hand to their location. His face was hidden within the hood since he transformed into that ominous form, yet Uthar could feel them. Those two abyssal orbs were trained at them, filled with monstrous killing intent.

What was with this lunatic? His demeanor had completely shifted when his coffin was mentioned, and now it looked like he was ready to fight to the death. Was that guy actually carrying around a beloved corpse inside or something? In either case, diplomacy was out the window. Some treasures to smooth things over wouldn't work.

'I've tried; I can't do anything to him,' Pa'sur sighed. 'His soul might even be more powerful than mine. No wonder he could withstand the [Soulhaze Lily]'s dreams.'

'Don't waste your energy on him, then. Focus on awakening Azra's spirit while providing support. It's already reached a point where we can't back down even if we want to. We're trapped, so we'll have to fight our way out,' Uthar intoned through [Stonewhisper] as he destroyed the wave of wraiths that had appeared again.

Even then, two more marks had been added to the mountain, and the corrosive blight spread deeper into the veins. He'd have to waste even more energy to push it out, or the avatar would collapse. These things were a constant bother, preventing him from properly dealing with the river of death.

How was this just one man with one set of skills? It felt like they were fighting an army.

Uthar didn't have a lot of options, and he knew he couldn't play it safe. Just breaking the river wasn't enough, even if he found the opportunity while calling down Azra's spirit to this plane. A deadly storm raged outside, one too powerful to overcome with Mana and far more in tune with their opponent than them.

The Draugr had clearly been able to traverse the island alone without accruing any damage, while they had been forced to hide beneath the ground while waiting for targets and treasures. Here, they were at least inside a mountain, evening the playing field. And if they fled, they'd have to give up on their half-summoned Diety, putting them in an even more dangerous situation.

This man was lethal to the extreme, and any half-measures would only end with more of his followers down for the count. Or even worse, he could get crippled to the point his breakthrough failed. Uthar gritted his teeth and took out the [Dawn Sierra], waves of hatred burning in his heart as he looked at the dense engravings covering the stone chest.

He'd saved it to purify his Mountain Core after passing the first threshold, but their strength wasn't enough. He needed assistance. Kalva breathed in relief upon seeing the legacy treasure they'd brought with them from back home. A true splinter of Azra imbued with its ancient will. Kalva clearly didn't care that this meant his Mountain Core would reach Middle Quality at most.

Then again, neither did Uthar at this moment.

'We need to delay him for 20 seconds. That's it. After that, we'll show him the might of Azra,' Uthar growled. 'Ridgebane Seeds!'

The two nodded, and thousands of pebbles spilled out of Kalva's sleeves. As they flew toward the malignant star, they started to grow under the light of Azra. Uthar felt the drain of Faith Power from the avatar, but it rapidly recovered and was even bolstered as he pushed the [Dawn Sierra] into the mountain.

Powerful mental fluctuations were simultaneously released by Pa'Sur, indicating he was imparting the stone soldiers with temporary life. Thousands of golems filled the cave in no time, empowered by Azra and their Dao. Kalva's eyes were closed in concentration—controlling this many elite stonemen was taxing, even when imbued with Divine Will and a spark of sapience from the mentalist.

One spectral wraith after another appeared to meet the challenge, and a vast web of chains shot out from that ghastly pillar. That was exactly what Uthar wanted to see. That monstrous Draugr was ultimately just one man, and he had already used up a huge amount of Miasma to maintain his advantage.

It also gave Uthar a breather, allowing him to redirect some of Azra's force. Huge spears filled with force assaulted the raging river, purifying it with the breath of the earth. But Uthar was eventually forced to stop and refocus on Azra. A few of his projectiles had managed to pierce the river, but it healed itself far too quickly for Uthar to dare attempt an escape. Just how durable was this cursed thing?

'They're ready,' Kalva intoned as two shimmering stones appeared from his sleeves.

Uthar bit his finger and left three drops of blood on each stone before they flew out, Anointing them with the lineage of the Sentinel Dawn. The stones grew into two ten-meter constructs, each radiating force equivalent to Early Hegemony.

By that point, the Draugr was already on the move. He'd finished mending the broken link, which had retreated into the coffin on his back. Now, he'd turned into a storm of carnage, unleashing his anger on

the Ridgebane soldiers. A huge jagged edge swept through the constructs as he paved a path toward their position. He was no longer waiting around for them to emerge from their protective umbrella.

Stone shavings were flowing everywhere as hundreds of sacrificial soldiers collapsed, but that was part of the plan. The broken stonemen turned into a swirling storm, trapping the Draugr and forming the Ridgebane Array. The two anointed stonemen stepped inside, acting as foundations for the trapping formation. The sounds of metal cutting stone abated, and Uthar breathed in relief and turned to the mountain.

The accrued faith from months of prayer poured into the divine avatar, bringing their summoning closer to fruition. But only five seconds passed before a huge form shot out of the formation and crashed into the mountain with enough force to create cracks across its surface. The whole Ridgebane Array exploded the next second, and Uthar blanched upon seeing the Draugr holding the head of the second anointed construct.

The head was crushed, and the construct collapsed. The lauded Ridgebane Array hadn't even managed to buy them ten seconds.

Worse, a storm of Death was dragged toward the Draugr as thousands of pitch-black tendrils stretched for twenty meters from his back like skeletal wings. The tendrils hummed with a soul-wrenching buzz, agitating the Death-attuned energies in the area. It came storming into the Draugr's body, ripping apart the lingering effect of the Ridgebane Array.

With his five-meter frame shrouded in darkness and swirling halo, the Draugr looked like a fallen God. His ominous aura towered as the wings swallowed a seemingly inexhaustible amount of energy until two crackling orbs formed at the wingtips. Uthar felt a palpable sense of imminent doom as he gazed upon a swirling grey haze rapidly forming around the axe.

The haze swallowed the two crackling orbs of destruction, and Uthar knew he couldn't wait any longer.

"Gaia!" he roared, sacrificing all his remaining Faith Energy to summon a dome of impregnable stone.

Kalva had already summoned his eight guardians, forming an inner barrier pointed at the cardinal directions. Pa'Sur activated his defensive domain, which would weaken any foreign Dao. But even with their layers of defense and Azra's protective umbrella, Uthar didn't feel safe. What was that man doing?

"Futile." A grating voice echoed from outside.

The world froze for a moment before reality came crashing down upon them. The impregnable wall of [Gaia's Sanctuary] shattered, split in two by an unstoppable edge. The cardinal statues crumbled the next moment, and Pa'Sur's domain was ripped to shreds. A groan escaped from the Mentalist's mouth, but Uthar had no time to worry about that useless bastard.

He pushed his Mana Domain to its limits as he tilted the divine avatar. The deadly blade ground against his path, but Azra's protection allowed him to finally exhaust the attack. Just as he thought himself safe, his danger sense warned of mortal peril. The protective domain of Azra had become frayed when blocking the ultimate strike, and a chain reeking of destruction had slipped inside their sanctuary.

And it was coming for him.

Ruthlessness shone in Uthar's eyes. A mental command activated the command token hidden beneath his robes. Pa'Sur's eyes glazed over just as he recovered from the spiritual backlash, long enough for Uthar to push the Mentalist in front of him. The chain latched onto the man, and he'd been yanked out of the protective dome by the time he woke up.

Uthar took a shuddering breath, knowing he'd just escaped a terrible fate. He'd seen what happened to Galvo after getting touched by one of that madman's chains. He refused to have his body bisected in this forgotten corner of space, and the Mentalist had proven useless against the Draugr's mental defenses.

Besides, it was mostly his fault they found themselves in this desperate situation. Offering himself as a substitute sacrifice was the least he could do. As the Mentalist was ripped out to meet his fate, [Gaia's Sanctuary] mended and sealed them inside. He felt the connection to [Stonewhisper] vanish, and it didn't even take a second before their sanctuary began shaking from an unrelenting onslaught.

One corrosive mark after another was added to the domain, and the Draugr himself had to be hammering the barrier. It was only a matter of time. However, the lunatic was finally out of lethal attacks, it seemed, which meant they'd earned enough time.

"It's payback time," Uthar growled a few seconds later, ignoring the unspoken reproach in Kalva's eyes.

The two floated into the mountain above. A soothing warmth spread through Uthar's body as Azra's spirit embraced him, and the stress and fear accumulated from this ill-fated encounter melted away. He'd become the Apostle of the Dawn Mountain, and he'd stand tall long after this Draugr and his descendants turned to dust. He ordered [Gaia's Sanctuary] to self-destruct as they emerged like a butterfly from its cocoon.

Only to be met by an orb of utter nothingness.

The enormous stone face managed to resist only for a moment before the Oblivion Beacon disintegrated its defenses and pushed into the eye on its forehead.

'SACRILEGE!' a grand voice boomed in Zac's mind, and a terrifying pressure bore down on both his body and soul.

Zac felt like an angry god had turned its attention to him, in a far more palpable sense than when he conjured Heaven's wrath. Faith Energy. These two had summoned a wisp of a god and hid inside its avatar. Thank god he'd acted quickly, opting to use the same strategy as when he fought the Eidolon inside the Twilight Ascent.

Encountering a Mountain God was unexpected, but it wasn't a surprise they were cooking up something dangerous. Why else would they sit around while the aura of the floating mountain kept rising? [Pillar of Desolation] was about to collapse in either case. Truthfully he'd been lucky they'd given up when they had. A few more good hits and the rivers would have collapsed, destabilizing the whole skill.

He'd hoped that the Peak-Quality [Desperation's End] would be enough to split the mountain in two before they reached this point, but the defenses of Earth Cultivators were just too sturdy. At least it had provided the opportunity to take out the Mentalist.

Zac had been prepared and timed everything perfectly with the pillar, yet it felt like he was about to be crushed under the unrelenting pressure. New tears appeared to replace those which the [Soulhaze Lily] had just mended, and muscles tore under the unbearable physical pressure. The presence demanded him to give in and kneel in obeisance, but that triggered an unprecedented ferocity from his body.

His three Draugr Nodes rippled with power. They filled his body with the gift of the Abyss, muting the roar of the false god. Adamance, Conviction, and Immutability. How could a descendant of Eoz bow to some crappy mountain? His aura surged, and he drew upon all his Strength to push the [Pillar of Desolation] further into the crumbling head.

The Mana Domain had already crumbled, forcibly ripped apart by Oblivion. Between that and the god's defenses, the beacon had shrunk by two-thirds already, with only the kernel of annihilation remaining. But that was enough. It came into contact with something ancient, unyielding, something that not even Oblivion could erase. The feeling only lasted a moment before it was gone, forced out of this realm by Zac's advance.

Left was a broken face bereft of any divinity. What was left of the Oblivion Beacon erupted and blew it apart. A bloody shape fell out from the crumbling form, and his heart was pierced before he could recover from the backlash. More Kill Energy poured into Zac's body, but he didn't spare the fallen mage a second glance. He scoured the collapsing face for clues until he spotted a second body tumbling toward the ground.

His Miasma was running low, but he had ample stores of Void Energy. He disappeared in a puff before appearing right next to the leader. [Black Death] was already falling toward his head, its gleaming edge filled with Death and Conflict. Like deadly spears, the remaining chains of [Love's Bond] converged on the leader, and Zac could feel Alea's killing intent as she was out for vengeance.

Axe and chains hit true, but Zac swore when the corpse crumbled into stone. A burst of energy erupted from within an inconspicuous stone just as Zac struck. Zac looked over with surprise. He'd scanned that stone with his soul, Draugr vision, and [Cosmic Gaze]. All three had said it was nothing there, yet there clearly was. Unfortunately, nothing remained by the time Zac reached the source except some glimmering sand.

The leader had gotten away.

"Was that you guys?" Zac asked, glancing down at the translucent bracelet on his wrist.

'Nope, that was all him. Pretty impressive escape method, for it to work inside a Calamity Storm,' Null commented. 'I can't imagine he's in good shape, though. Such a forceful method always has drawbacks, like damaged foundations. He might have lost his opportunity to break through in this place.'

"So one slipped through the cracks, after all," Zac sighed.

'Well, him running for his life toward the exit should help with the next part,' Null commented.

"Not as much as his corpse would have," Zac countered, turning to the unmoving bodies of the three fallen warriors.

Normally, the Mentalist wouldn't have left a corpse after being captured by [Pillar of Desolation]. However, Zac had opted to decapitate him before he was turned into another statue, leaving him with a body almost a match to Vilari's. Perhaps this one could become a disciple of hers after being awakened.

The trio joined the crowing collection in his Corpse Sack while their rings entered one of his pockets. There was no time to go through his windfall right now. Anyone within miles would have been able to sense their battle, and Zac didn't want to stick around in case a third party arrived to fish in muddy waters.

He briefly scanned his body as he ate a Pseudo D-grade Soldier Pill. He was actually in a pretty good state. His opponents this time were simply too unlucky. Their turtle strategy might have worked against most. Zac guessed less than 50 people in the Perennial Vastness would be able to break open that formation before they could finish their preparations.

But when faced with someone like Zac, they had become sitting ducks locked in on a path toward their doom. His body only had some fractures from fighting against the false god's pressure. His soul was actually even better off now than when the fight began, as the [Soulhaze Lily]'s energies still hadn't been exhausted.

Zac gave the cave a quick look before flashing away, appearing at the exit. The storm still raged outside, which wasn't a surprise considering less than three minutes had passed since he entered the cave. After scanning the surroundings with his soul and other senses, he stepped into the madness, continuing his journey toward the island's edge.

He'd fought off the first wave of profiteers, but Zac knew this tribulation was far from over. Even discounting the parties waiting on the other shores, there was one more enemy he had to deal with.

The Calamity itself and the vast chasm between himself and the exit.