

The Fall 1001

[Chapter 1001 - Three Fates](#)

The last rat fought against the suffocating chains, but a ruthless swing ended the struggle. Zac panted as he ripped [Black Death] out of the Beast King's head, adding its corpse to the growing pile of carcasses in his Spatial Ring. Zac grimaced as he pushed back his leaking entrails into his gut, applying a paste while expending two healing brands to patch up the wound.

While pondering on the Dao in his cave back home, he'd always longed for adventure among the stars. But you always forget these small details. Adventures were pretty grimy, and you often ended up leaking stuff that shouldn't leave the confines of your body.

Over the past day, Zac had either ambushed or been ambushed over thirty times, and he was starting to get worn down. The beasts and packs which could make the Calamity Mountain's prime real estate their homes weren't messing around. It was no wonder no one guarded the slopes against interlopers. Why bother? The outsiders would die the moment they dared enter the tunnels.

At least he'd made good headway. When Zac entered the mountain, he'd continued straight toward its heart. The two attuned stars were in a locked orbit with the mountain, which meant one side of the mountain was teeming with Death while the tunnels on the other side were filled with Life. He needed a little bit of both for his method, so he had to reach the center where the energies converged.

The fact that the pack of rats he'd stumbled onto were life-attuned proved he was getting close. The pungent smell of blood lingered in the den even after storing away all the corpses. Predators hoping to find a wounded victor would soon arrive. However, Zac didn't immediately leave.

Instead, he followed the urgings of Verun in his mind until he reached a pile of what he hoped was mud. After pushing it away with the huge edge of [Gorehew], a radiant glimmer lit up the whole area. Zac looked at the thing curiously. It wasn't a crystal, neither was it some stone or metal. It rather looked like a piece of dried bark containing just incredible amounts of Divine Energy.

A small dried piece from a C-grade tree, perhaps? Even if it was only a small piece and quite aged, it had once held incredibly lofty Daos of Life. It was definitely a D-grade Natural Treasure, perhaps even a Middle-stage one. The energy it released was to the point the whole cave started to vibrate.

It was the adjacent passage, a wind tunnel full of turbulent Death, that was being instigated by its natural enemy being so close by. Zac urgently stowed away the treasure before running away, his hands burning upon touching the bark like a hot coal. Avaricious roars were already echoing through the tunnels, but they sounded quite distant.

Zac just grinned as he turned into an abyssal wraith, squeezing through a small crack to join the corridor of miasmic winds. The rats had clearly understood that treasure was beyond what they could hold onto with their strength, so they had isolated its powerful energy emanations with the mud.

But their aggression was their folly. They'd attacked Zac just for passing by outside their den, even if he had no intention of messing with them. By the time he fought his way inside, Verun had woken up from within his Spatial Ring, roaring with hunger. It had indicated in no uncertain terms there was something it wanted to eat here.

Since [Verun's Bite] had reached Peak E-grade, it rarely showed any interest in materials. Verun doing so this time strongly indicated the piece of bark would be able to assist its breakthrough into a D-grade Spirit Tool. The only other thing he'd gotten his hands on so far was the mysterious drops Iz had given him after breaking through the first layer of his [Void Vajra Sublimation].

The Tool Spirit wanted to drink those drops, and Zac guessed it could act as a catalyst for elevating its spirit. But it was just a few drops, far from the pile of expensive materials Zac expected he'd need to gather to upgrade his weapon. Finally, he was making some progress, and the fact he could find useful high-grade materials in this place was a promising sign.

Because if there were good things down here, then the upper layers of the Calamity were bound to have amazing treasures for both Alea and Verun. Now, he only needed a mission, preferably a long-term one, taking him back here. That way, he could earn Mana while treasure hunting rather than forking out 250 Mana a day.

In a second, Zac had moved hundreds of meters back and forth through the complicated network of stormy and calm tunnels. Finally, he found another slim crack and squeezed through, arriving in a separate set of tunnels. [Abyssal Phase] had been his go-to method to avoid dangerous situations and take shortcuts toward the center.

Zac continued for another hour until he finally found what he'd been looking for; a storm chamber. He'd arrived through a tunnel carrying Death-attuned winds. On the other side, another pathway poured out similar amounts of Life. Unsurprisingly, the chamber where the two energies met was a madhouse with ceaseless explosions like those that had assaulted him on his arrival to the Red Zone.

It was essentially a storm in a bottle, pushing up toward some unseen exhaust. From there, the chaotic storm would become the clouds that covered a good chunk of the Calamity Mountain.

Even Zac didn't dare enter the storm chamber, let alone cultivate inside it. He wasn't after the chamber itself but rather the streams. He looked around the area for a while but sighed, failing to find what he was looking for. But there were quite a few such chambers in the heart of the mountain, and Zac eventually struck gold.

The constant explosions led to cracks forming in the surrounding walls, and Zac found a small fissure leading to a sealed chamber just a few meters below another storm chamber. The whole cave constantly shuddered from the barrage, but it looked stable enough otherwise. More importantly, the isolating rocks that made up the Calamity Mountain couldn't perfectly seal off the incredible amounts of energy and Dao trapped in the storm chamber.

The stone acted like a filter as the Daos of Life and Death squeezed through, providing a steady stream of calmed-down energies. However, being constantly infiltrated by opposing Daos was bound to weaken its integrity over time. Looking at the ceiling, Zac guessed it would break in a couple of years, increasing the size of the storm chamber. But for now, it held, creating a perfect cultivation chamber for his needs.

The energy density was far beyond the normal tunnels, but there was one problem. Due to the cracks leading into the cave from the Death-attuned side, the Daos weren't in balance. Some Life emerged from the ceiling, but it wasn't enough for his needs. Zac walked over to the opposite side of the cave, looking at the small cracks in the wall.

Nothing but a few trickles of Life came out; it was clear the fissures weren't as wide on this side. However, the rocks were weakened already, and Zac started to chip away with his Dao-empowered and [Blighted Cut]. The Dao of Life that had been ingrained into the stone for years clashed with the Dao in Zac's attacks, and chips of rocks started to gather at his feet.

One hour later, his mad frenzy had damaged the wall enough to release roughly the same amount of energy from both sides. Adding more Life-attuned energies improved the density of energy and Dao even further, and a miniature storm was already brewing in his cave. Zac took a deep breath as he felt the agitated Daos dance around him.

This was perfect.

Zac spent the next hour installing one array after another. First, he set up two gathering arrays, one on each side of the cave. It helped keep the energies slightly separated, preventing them from exhausting themselves before becoming fuel for his cultivation. Next came Isolation, trapping, and killing arrays, turning his makeshift cave into a proper cultivation chamber. After some hesitation, Zac even installed a wall-breaking array on the ceiling.

If someone snuck into the cave to attack him, he could bring the storm down on their head.

Even then, Zac didn't start his cultivation session. He silently sat in the middle of the brewing storm, hidden by an invisibility array. Deliberating. Waiting. Part of it was because he wanted to see if someone had followed him or been attracted by the sound of his remodeling. Some assassin could be lying in wait until Zac lowered his guard. But the bigger reason was that this was his final chance to turn back.

The idea had been born during his years of secluded cultivation, and it had only grown stronger as time passed. The third reincarnation was similar to his Minor Sublimation in that it was a major threshold. The method called the result a Three Fates Soul, representing his three rebirths. More importantly, it could be considered a crossroad where you had to make a decision—a decision of what direction you wanted to take.

'Enlightened by the heavenly revolutions of Life and Death, the Soul embraces the Samsara. One begets nine, and nine begets the one. Balance is at the heart of Heavenly Law. For one to rise, another must fall. One to lead, nine to follow. Reincarnate to align with your path, become one with the Cosmos.

Nine layers of the Abyss carry the Heaven. Nine Heavens seal the Abyss. Relinquish the nine, the boundless Dharma, abject of self.

Nine returns to the one.

Such was the description of the third reincarnation. The manual was as vague as ever, but Zac wasn't the same person as the one who almost got himself killed when undergoing the first breakthrough. Thanks to years of studying Life, Death, and their intrinsic nature, he was no longer a clueless Progenitor. And aided by innumerable mini-epiphanies, he'd already allowed him to unlock the secrets of the third and fourth reincarnations.

The meaning was simple; pick a side. Between Life and Death, one needed to be a leader while the other followed. Zac still wasn't certain if the [Nine Reincarnations Manual] was really Buddhist, but he actually

doubted it. Something about it seemed different. It was more Daoist in nature than Buddhist, though it borrowed some theories from the Sangha.

It was even possible the original version had come from the previous era and then been refitted better to suit the cultivation system of the Era of Order. It was impossible to tell with only the first five layers, unaware of where it was leading.

What Zac could deduce was that the [Nine Reincarnations Manual] was not meant for true Edgewalkers such as himself. Even Vilari, with her nigh-complete absence of affinity with the Dao of Life, could cultivate the first layer. If you had an uncommonly high affinity with both Life and Death, you had a chance at reaching the third reincarnation.

But Chaos Cultivators was a thing from the previous era. Those constitutions couldn't really form under a Heaven where the Dao of Chaos was still broken. No matter the original intent and method of the manual, you now had to pick either Life and Death to be the leader. In other words, you'd form an attuned core.

The attuned sides would no longer use the concept of clashing Daos to continue progress. The nine following the one would strictly become a cultivation resource—Life supporting Death, or vice versa.

Apart from picking a side, you could also keep your Soul unattuned. It was what the 'Boundless Dharma, abject of self' meant. However, Zac had a feeling that relinquishing the nine wasn't optimal. Nine was the utmost. To relinquish the nine most likely meant the ceiling of your Soul would be lower when continuing through the reincarnations.

Very few methods were so flexible that they could be branched this way, yet Zac wasn't satisfied. Why pick when you could have it all?

Zac wanted his Soul to be attuned to Life, and he wanted it to be attuned to Death. Just like his body. Just like his path. But to accomplish that, he'd have to step off the beaten path and rewrite the method to better suit his needs.

That by itself wasn't anything special. Most elites had already started doing so with their manuals by the time they approached Hegemony. You used the foundations the predecessors had laid to build something new and unique. If you blindly followed the Heritages of others, you'd only ever be a follower and never a leader.

In reality, most such creations were destined to fall into obscurity, often disappearing when their inventors succumbed on the road of cultivation. A few progenitors found great success, and their ideas would form the foundations for the following generations.

However, it was more than a small overhaul in Zac's case. He wanted to model his Soul Core after his Blueprint. On the one hand, Zac felt it made sense. His Cosmic Core was a mirror of his Daos, so why shouldn't his Soul be one as well? On the other, it was too difficult. Translating the concepts of energy to the intangible mystery of the Soul was easier said than done.

Ultimately, Zac knew doing it all at once was too much. Like Lord Engo said before, his core was based on partly borrowed knowledge. So he came up with a plan that he felt would take a step in the right direction.

The [Nine Reincarnations Manual] seemingly followed the cycle of one to nine and nine to one to reform and refine. During this reincarnation, he could throw either set of outer cores into his central core, creating a truly attuned core. But what if he picked both? Instead of returning to one, he'd create an Inexorable Soul Core and an Evolutionary Soul Core.

The concept wasn't as advanced as his Cosmic Core, but it was the first step toward true unity. From there, he could keep working at it until he fused the two halves back together at a future reincarnation. After all, with his Void Emperor Bloodline, he was bound to delve into the truths of the Void sooner or later. For now, he was benefitting from the Void without understanding, like a child. But that would have to change sooner or later.

By the time he understood the Void, his path would grow wider, allowing him to take it in more directions. The trinity could become a duality, possibly even a singularity of unmatched prowess. Or he could keep things as is while properly using all three of his Daos in combat rather than two.

All that was an incredibly distant goal, though. Zac didn't even know how to begin to study the Void of Dao. His only clue was Ultom, which might contain some information missives. For now, Zac only needed to create a Soul Core representing each of his sides.

Such a change to the [Nine Reincarnations Manual] was much more straightforward. The manual and array were already designed to either form a core of Life or Death. He "only" needed to do both at once, with some small alterations, while providing extra energy to form two central cores instead of one. Of course, Zac had long since plotted out the critical changes to the method, using some of the extra Lake Water to ensure he wasn't overestimating himself.

Everything was in place, yet he hesitated.

Zac knew there were some real risks with this plan, and not only because he was planning on breaking through in a place like the Calamity. He could keep his Soul unattuned and worry about this issue in the future. Harmonizing his cultivation to align with his path was obviously better than not doing so, but he was still considered the younger generation. There was still time to deal with these things in the future.

The hours passed, and Zac eventually made his choice. He'd not gotten this far by playing it safe, and his instincts told him to go big. He needed to keep grasping for power if he wanted to have a chance at catching up with his mother. Of even surviving the deadly gauntlet of Ultom. The moment he started to back down when faced with danger or a challenge, his path would grow narrower.

Filled with conviction, Zac's eyes snapped open. It was time to start. Like the previous breakthroughs, it all began with a final cycle of Mental Energy through the array disks to power the process. But even before he began, there was a change of pace. Today, nine cycles wouldn't be followed by nine more.

This time, he took out both Array Disks at once.