

The Fall 1006

[Chapter 1006 - Calamity](#)

A huge gust passed by overhead, leaving behind a curtain of explosions. A boulder the size of a skyscraper fell in the distance, piercing through the budding storm and enraging it even further. A moment later, the winds had reached Zac, who pushed the chains of [Love's Bond] into the ground to avoid getting swept away.

A deadly storm was descending on the region, this one an even mix of life and death. Explosions of both elements lit up the sky, and visibility worsened by the second. Last time, it had turned into a painful lesson about the dangers of the Red Zones, but Zac didn't start looking for a cave to weather the storm.

Instead, he chose to keep moving. But just as Zac was about to resume his sprint toward the other shore, Zac felt a surge in his body. The source wasn't the gathering energies around him that had burrowed into his body. Rather, it was [Immutability of Eoz] that had woken up.

Its cleansing waves of darkness swept through his body, forcing an illusory mark to the surface. It contained a weak hint of fire, and Zac's eyes widened in surprise. He really couldn't look down on the guests in this place. The ranged assassin had been powerful enough to damage Alea's chains, and the melee fighter managed to leave a delayed tracking mark in the conflagration.

Zac hadn't noticed a thing. He would have been in big trouble if not for his Hidden Node. Zac ran a thorough scan of himself and the chains, but it looked like that was it. Still, the experience filled him with greater urgency, and he risked his safety by activating [Abyssal Phase] despite the explosions around him.

Why leave a tracking mark if you weren't planning to come back, most likely with backup? The theory the two before were scouts of a larger party had grown more likely, and Zac needed to get away. The surroundings turned to a blur as Zac turned into a stream shooting across the island's surface. The agitated energies felt like knives cutting through his incorporeal form, and he soon couldn't maintain the skill anymore.

He appeared in a secluded vale in a puff of Miasma, his body covered in shallow wounds. Zac didn't do anything to deal with the lacerations. For one, they'd close soon enough thanks to his improved constitution. Secondly, his ichor worked just as well as his blood to quell the growing storm around him.

His movement skill was quick, but it couldn't match up to the ferocity of the Calamity. Half a minute later, the storm had caught up, reducing visibility to almost zero. Screaming gales and constant eruptions drowned out all other sounds. At least it would be incredibly difficult for his pursuers to find him like this.

Even the constant roars of beasts fighting were gone. They knew well enough not to stay on the surface when faced with the wrath of the environment. Explosions in the atmosphere grew more frantic, and just moving became a chore. But as bad as Zac had it, the other guests probably had it worse.

The coalitions might have been able to prepare some measures against the environment if they had more time, but this was a time-sensitive event. There was only so much you could do in a few minutes.

And this was his chance. The further he could progress while the others were locked down, the fewer enemies he'd have to fight.

If lucky, a lot of people might leave the Calamity altogether upon seeing a Life-Death storm bear down on them.

A scream of danger made Zac look up, and he swore with alarm as he leapt out of the way, using the chains to ensure he wasn't dragged away. A powerful gust ripped Zac's anchor out of the ground and flung him into the sky, forcing him to take his wraith form again. Cascading waves of Life and Death ravaged his body, but Zac held on long enough to move a few hundred meters away.

His body was covered in far nastier wounds when he reformed, but he wasted no time as he activated [Profane Exponents] just in time to partly block out a tremendous shockwave. The coffin-wielding skeleton bore the brunt of the force, only surviving thanks to the latest addition to the skill.

Upon reaching Peak Mastery, a fourth Skeleton was added, looking like a hooded mage holding an ancient tome. It emitted dense plumes of death and was the source of the large sigil beneath his feet. On its own, the sigil formed a second layer of defense, weakening any force entering it. However, the mage skeleton actually had a second feature—empowerment.

Every time the skill was activated, Zac could have the mage strengthen one of the other three pygmy skeletons and their abilities. This time, the empowerment went into the coffin-wielding defender, which increased the durability of its barrier by over 30%. A second barrier also sprung up around the sigil, a lesser mimicry of the coffin blocking out the shockwave.

The skill ultimately cracked, but only after exhausting most of the furious waves of Life and Death that had covered the area like a tsunami. Even the deadly haze was momentarily swept away, allowing Zac to see what had almost just killed him.

A boulder hundreds of meters across had almost landed on his head just now, clearly a broken-off piece of the collapsing Calamity Mountain. Huge cracks spread across the ground, and an endless series of shudders indicated this deadly projectile wasn't the only one.—

Suddenly, neither guests nor storms were the most pressing threat. Something must have changed with the Calamity Mountain for pieces this big to fall with such frequency. Each one was like a small extinction event. Even if he could avoid getting crushed by one, how long could the island survive?

A chain shot forward, latching onto a cliff jutting out from the ground while Vivi's vines did the same. But rather than carefully dragging himself forward, Zac used them as safety lines as he ran for his life. The winds tried to rip him away, but a thick block suddenly appeared in his arms.

It was a piece of D-grade metal called [Nightblight Alloy], which he'd gotten from the Undead Empire. After Alea swallowed the incredibly heavy alloy he looted from the Twilight Ocean Realm Spirit's treasury, Zac continued looking for suitable materials for her evolution to D-grade. This alloy weighed as much as a small mountain, preventing Zac from easily getting dragged away by the Dao-empowered winds.

It even served as a shield, as a small piece of rock suddenly appeared through the storm, flying toward him with such speed Zac didn't even get the chance to react. A loud clang boomed out as Zac was flung

ten meters back, feeling like someone had punched him in the gut. At least it beat getting eviscerated, and Zac looked down at the depression on the metal block with trepidation.

Still, errant shrapnel wasn't enough for Zac to back down. He got back on his feet and kept running. The sky soon darkened further ahead, forcing Zac to hunker down and activate his defensive skill again.

Zac's senses were strained to the limits as he was forced to look for threats in every direction. Occasionally he stumbled into fearful beasts desperately searching for safe harbor. They weren't in the mood to fight with random passers-by, except for a tiger who thought Zac blocked a nearby cave.

Suddenly, Zac sensed something different in the cloud—two cultivators. They were humans, one who almost had Billy's heft, while the other had a thin sword slung across her back. They'd created some sort of wind tunnel, moving with impressive speed. Shimmering Mana Barriers also surrounded both, proof they'd reached the fourth echelon. Only those who had at least 30,000 Mana could turn on and off their Mana Barriers at will inside Red Zones.

Still, many opted not to use them, including the man he slew inside the Calamity Mountain and the scouts from before. It wasn't overconfidence, though. Because of their choice, Zac's own Mana Barrier wouldn't activate when they tried to launch a sneak attack. This was a small advantage higher-echelon guests had over new arrivals, and an important reason most people avoided Red Zone the first years.

Veterans could fight you while blocking the protection provided by the Perennial Vastness. And they could turn on their shield the moment they started to get disadvantaged. Of course, the barriers were weaker in this place compared to Vastness City, but it could still be the difference between life and death.

As for the two cultivators, they used their barriers to slightly weaken the storm in their immediate vicinity. Still, its efficacy was limited, far worse than Zac's ichor. Instead, they were forced to use treasures to stave off the winds, yet both were covered in bloody gashes.

The two suddenly disappeared just seconds after Zac sensed them with his spiritual domain. Zac felt a pang of danger, and a coffin appeared behind his back. The whole coffin was swallowed by a huge burning dragon that had emerged from the fist of the bulky man, but Zac blasted it apart with a swing of his axe.

The trusty coffin of [Profane Exponents] appeared to block a sword strike from the opposite direction, but Zac was shocked to find the thin rapier create a small hole in the skill and pierce through. Pain bloomed in his side as Zac narrowly managed to avoid having his heart pierced, and the swordmistress was forced back by a set of corrosive chains closing in.

The strike hurt like hell, but Zac ignored her as he advanced on the pugilist, his muscles straining as he swung [Black Death] with all force he could muster. The man's fist lit up like a sun as he opted to fight fire with fire and strike right at the incoming axe. Unfortunately for him, he had severely underestimated his opponent's strength.

Deathly axe met burning brass knuckles, and the burning conflagration was immediately cut apart as Zac's edge dug into his fist. Two Dao Branches empowered the man's strikes, but only one seemed to be at Middle Stage. Conversely, Zac worked with two Middle Dao Branches bolstered by [Spiritual Void] and had clear attribute superiority.

The pugilist activated his Mana Barrier upon seeing himself lose, and Zac actually found his arm pushed back. But he reacted instantaneously and bore a second stab from the swordmistress as he unleashed a ruthless kick right at what he prayed was a weak spot in the barrier. The pugilist effortlessly blocked even if he'd just lost two fingers, but a kick by Zac wasn't so easily neutralized.

Muscles snapped, and bones groaned in Zac's legs as he pushed [Conviction of Eoz] far beyond the safe levels, boosting his strength by over 20%. The monstrous force blasted the pugilist away like he was launched from a cannon.

Normally, that wouldn't have been a big deal, but they were currently in the middle of a storm. Zac sensed the man get swept away by a wind soon after being thrown away, and he was dragged out of Zac's domain a moment later.

"Pato!" the woman screamed, disappearing in a flash after leveling a deadly stare at Zac.

Zac snorted and continued on his way after picking up one of the severed fingers—the one with a Spatial Ring still attached. The two thought him an easy mark to make some money in the middle of the storm; there was no pity in Zac's heart for people like them. He would have killed them both if not for wanting to save his aces for the real opponents lurking in the area.

He hadn't gained any Kill Energy from the clash, but Zac knew the man was in trouble. Even if he managed to retain his consciousness, he had been flung right into the storm. Zac had been in that exact situation right upon entering the Calamity three days ago and knew just how deadly that situation was. Zac had even infused the man with a good chunk of his Dao of Conflict to turn him into a lightning rod for the environment.

The pugilist would be lucky if he survived long enough to find land through the chaos, and that was not counting the numerous boulders and smaller shrapnel-like rubble mixed into the storm.

Thirty minutes passed, and the chaos just grew worse. Zac didn't need to bleed himself to create a field of protection. If anything, he was forced to keep up field repairs of his battered body to avoid bleeding out. There'd been a dozen near-death encounters, mostly from shrapnel falling from the sky with nigh-undodgeable speed. He would have been grievously wounded if not for his Void Energy and [Abyssal Phase].

And he wasn't the only one in trouble. Finally, the island couldn't take it anymore. A deep groan reached the very core of Zac's body before a huge crack appeared just one hundred meters away from him. The whole island had been split apart, and Zac desperately leaped to the other side upon realizing his half had started falling toward the abyss.

Zac was exhausted by this point, but there wasn't much to do but swallow a Soldier Pill and forge ahead. At least it shouldn't be that long before he reached the end of the island. Even inside the storm, he'd kept a decent pace, and the guidance beam indicated he was getting close to the teleporter.

Suddenly, another peak came crashing from the sky, forcing Zac to call upon his skeletal guardians again. The shockwave passed, but Zac looked up with shock as he saw his hands turn into corkscrews. In a similarly surreal fashion, a nearby boulder sprouted wings and flew away, singing a song of liberation.

Zac shook his head, and both hands and boulder returned to normal. He looked at the fallen peak with surprise. It hadn't been Creation Energy that twisted its surroundings. There had rather been a powerful spiritual fluctuation baked into the shockwave just now. It had even managed to overwhelm his incredible mental protection for a moment, putting him in a dreamlike state.

Even now, a powerful spiritual fluctuation emanated from the peak, and the source wasn't a skill. Rather, it seemed like there was an incredible Soul-attuned treasure in that piece of debris, which was further proven by the gathering of fate around it. Zac only hesitated a moment before running toward the miniature mountain.

The situation was dire, but his soul suddenly felt like an arid desert. And whatever hid within that mountain was the rain needed to make him whole. Its fluctuations weren't quite at the level of the [Calamity Core], but it had to be one of the best natural treasures on the mountain.

A few jumps later, Zac stood inside a huge cave, and his heart shuddered at the lingering aura. It was incredibly condensed, still releasing mental ripples throughout the cave that almost scattered Zac's thoughts. More importantly, it was an aura Zac recognized. It was the Late-Stage Beast King that had scanned him after breaking through.

This had to be its den, which meant the small flower in the shimmering pond was one of its cultivation treasures. It looked a bit worse from the wear after having been thrown down from the sky, and most of its pond was gone. But it still exuded incredible waves of Spiritual Energy, and Zac had to activate both a soul-warding talisman and [Indomitable] to withstand its aura.

Still, Zac didn't think it was a hallucinogenic plant. It was most likely a side-effect of the powerful spiritual fluctuations it emitted. Going by the hunger in Zac's body, it was most likely an incredible tonic for his soul, something he could use after his recent breakthrough. Half a day had passed since he broke through, but he had only managed to repair some of the damage caused by his brutish breakthrough.

He could only eat so many soul-mending pills before they lost their efficacy, but this could be the key to quickly recovering to an optimal state. Zac braved the mental fluctuations and harvested the flower. He put it inside a jade box and added a number of Soul Crystals along with some pond water upon seeing the flower lose its spirituality. Even then, Zac judged it wouldn't retain its effects for more than an hour or two before it was relegated to a normal Peak-Quality item.

Zac was about to put the box away, but a deep voice suddenly boomed through the chamber.

"So, someone beat us to the punch."

Zac swirled around and almost felt his vision had been inverted for a moment. He was standing inside a small mountain looking upon a sturdy man, yet it felt like the man was the mountain while Zac stood on the ground. He had an immense aura, towering yet calm like an ancient peak. Even the storm was pushed away from the cave mouth by his presence, though Zac guessed that was a result of his huge accumulation of Mana.

After all, Null had just confirmed this cultivator was a proper eighth-echelon guest.

Even the three companions to his sides were no slouches. Each emitted an aura rivaling those of the strongest warriors he'd dueled in Vastness City. Zac inwardly sighed and cursed his greed. He had wanted to avoid trouble, but a moment of weakness had led him straight into a viper's nest.

It only took one look to know there was no talking his way out of this one.