

The Fall 1049

[Chapter 1049 - Back at the Scene](#)

Zac was reluctant but still sent the message he'd been dreading for so long. Catheya soon arrived, and Zac saw his emotions mirrored on her face.

"It's time?" Catheya sighed.

"It's time."

"We only got seven years," Catheya muttered, leaning her head against his chest.

Zac's heart bled, but he pressed on. "I can't stay much longer. I'm going straight into seclusion after getting the remnants. I don't think I'll be able to do much beyond sending a message that I'm back."

"Do you really have to do something so dangerous? Can't you form your core the normal way?"

"I could, but it would be just as risky, only in a different way," Zac said. "If my idea works, I'll be able to skip right past the most dangerous part."

"I'd ask you to be careful, but when has that ever worked?" Catheya wryly smiled. "When are you leaving?"

"We still have some time."

Zac spent the following days not sparing a thought about cultivation, the future, or the many things that usually demanded his attention. He spent all his time with Catheya, trying to squeeze a lifetime into two weeks. Ogras also popped in a few times for a drink and to reminisce. It was blissful, but reality soon caught up.

"I'm going to miss you," Catheya said as the teleportation gate sprung up behind him. "I'm jealous. It'll only be a few months for you on the outside. Meanwhile, I'll stay here for at least another three years."

Zac weakly smiled as he held her in his arms.

"Alright, go," Catheya smiled as she took a step back. "It's time for you to show everyone they were wrong. That you can fuse Life and Death. I can't wait to see their faces."

"I'll miss you," Zac said. "Be careful until we see each other again."

With that, Zac stepped through the teleporter, jumping through a Green Zone to step onto the teleportation square. Zac's heart was a mess as he put his hand against the teleportation pillar, opening up a path to the Calamity. He stepped inside and was immediately forced to fasten himself to the ground with Vivi's vines as a roaring wind tried to sweep him off his feet. But not even the raging squalls could drown out the storm in his mind.

One island after another flashed by as Zac woodenly began the ascent toward the Calamity's upper layers, but Zac barely registered it. He exuded such a desolate aura the native beasts didn't dare approach, but he almost wished they had. They had tried to keep a positive outlook for the future, but the reality of the situation they found themselves in was impossible to completely ignore.

The situation was so messy, and there were no guarantees things would work out how they'd hoped. It had almost felt like a breakup, a goodbye. But Zac soon shook himself out of his state. Their problems wouldn't be solved by him moping around. The sooner he broke through, the more time he would have to work toward their goals on the outside.

It was an odd feeling, traversing the Calamity again. Seven years had passed since his last visit. In that time, he hadn't gotten much stronger, really. His only real gain was his evolved constitution, but his attributes were almost the same. Even then, it was completely different being back.

It was so easy.

Part of it was certainly his eleventh-echelon Mana Domain. The unstable deposits of Life and Death were bent to his will within ten meters. It essentially removed the danger from sudden and deadly explosions biting into his flesh. The other part was experience. Having visited so many dangerous regions had given him an instinctual understanding of Dao-filled environments' shifting and unpredictable nature.

The first step was understanding they weren't unpredictable at all. The seemingly random storm around him followed the laws of Dao, just like everything else. The better you understood the Dao, the better you would be prepared for whatever the universe threw at you. When paired with his Danger Sense and connection to the Daos around him, Zac didn't even get close to encountering anything considered dangerous over the next two days.

Admittedly, he had luck on his side. The lower layer of the Calamity was somewhat calm, without any squalls that forced him to take cover. He kept a steady pace climbing higher and higher, eventually reaching an island just below a dense cloud curtain crackling with unstable energy.

It was the great divider separating the lower and upper regions of the Calamity. You could consider it the test you needed to pass to access the richer environments above. All beasts living on the lower islands dreamed of making it through the barrier, but most Early Beast Kings would have to put their lives on the line to pass through.

Zac didn't believe he'd be quite that pressed, but he still made ample preparations as he waited for an opportunity to arrive. The hours passed until Zac finally sensed the eruption of energy below he'd been waiting for. There was no island inside the storm curtain you could use to advance. Instead, you had to catch a ride.

Small vibrations shook the island, indicating it was time to go. A golden laurel appeared on Zac's head while the pillars of [Empyrean Aegis] rose behind him. With his defenses in place, Zac disappeared from the shore, using [Earthstrider] to appear over a hundred meters into the air. The jump allowed him to get a better look at the situation below, and he took two rapid steps to get into position.

Normally, he'd already be falling toward the depths below, but Zac activated a Wind Talisman to temporarily render him weightless. Then, a specialized glider looking like a huge frisbee appeared beneath his feet, just in time for a powerful pillar of wind to slam into it from below. The combination of his weightlessness and the glider's large surface area resulted in a tremendous amount of lift, and Zac shot upward like a cannon.

The glider broke apart from the energy-dense updraft, but it had already served its purpose. Zac deactivated the wind talisman just as he was about to enter the clouds, returning his weight. Even then, he found himself tossed around like a ragdoll by the raging storm within. Not even his Mana Domain was enough to quell the unbridled energy around him, and Zac found himself in the same situation as when he first entered the Calamity all those years ago.

He was like a leaf in the middle of a hurricane, and a constant barrage of chaotic explosions tried to break through the golden barrier enclosing him. Zac could feel the first and second pillars crumbling down below, and bleeding gashes started appearing on his body.

The calming effect of his blood worked wonders, and the storm weakened a bit. Zac helped the process by opening a series of wounds across his body, which helped spread out the effect. Still, the onslaught was relentless. The third pillar soon crumbled, and the fourth was teetering on collapse.

Luckily, the curtain wasn't all that thick, and the accumulated momentum had given him more than enough speed. Zac shot out of the clouds just as the fourth pillar collapsed. He took out a second glider and used the remaining updraft to steer the vessel toward a nearby island.

He was in luck. Sometimes, you found yourself in the middle of a no man's land after passing through. At that point, you could only fall back into the curtain to make a second attempt later, unless you had some special means of flight. With the curtain overcome and an island just ten minutes away, Zac knew he'd passed the first hurdle of his mission.

Zac took out a healing pill as he took in the surroundings. It was a familiar yet foreign scene. The upper layer of the Calamity was mostly more of the same, but everything was magnified. The innumerable suns were larger and more radiant, resulting in greater ambient energies. That, in turn, generated more ferocious storms.

In such an environment, the smaller islands of the lower region wouldn't survive for long. As such, the upper islands were fewer but much larger, and Zac could already spot three hulking Calamity Mountains floating in the distance. More importantly, he could vaguely feel a hint of his target coming from somewhere above. The fluctuations were weak and distant, but it was unmistakably Creation and Oblivion.

It could have been just a natural occurrence of the Daos. The environment was certainly energy-dense enough to form at least some hints of the upper Daos of the Peak of Chaos. The remnants were stirring in his mind, though, confirming that it wasn't some random treasure that had been born.

Zac soon reached the island, where he was greeted by two powerful presences locking onto him. He hesitated a moment before releasing his aura. He only did so momentarily before restraining it as he ran, keeping to the shores. The pressure receded soon after, and the owners never made an appearance.

The auras had likely belonged to Middle Stage Beast Kings, but they hadn't bothered with him after confirming he was just crossing the area. The aura he'd released was also enough to give them pause, and these beasts were smart enough to realize he wasn't looking to take anyone's lair like the vagabonds.

Not all beasts were so pragmatic, and Zac was forced into one pitched battle after another as he continued his ascent. Some beasts were simply stupid and aggressive; others wanted to gobble him up to improve their cultivation. After all, he was essentially a Supreme Natural Treasure with his attuned constitutions to the beasts of the Calamity. The constant harassment was annoying, but it wasn't even at the level of Endless Cerulean.

And the call urged him on.

It hadn't taken long for the intangible feeling of the remnants had turned into something clear. He could sense both splinter and shard above, and they seemed to be quite close to each other. A day passed as he got closer and closer until he finally spotted the source. He had just crossed a huge island that looked like a flat hill, possibly the broken-off base of a Calamity Mountain, and his destination was finally in full view.

It wasn't a Calamity Mountain as he'd expected, but rather two suns seemingly locked in orbit with each other. They were slowly rotating just outside each other's reach, like duelists circling their opponent in search of an opening. You didn't need to have your head crammed full of ancient horrors to realize there was something different about these two suns compared to the others. The darkness of the 'death'-attuned star was much deeper, like the orb atop his [Pillar of Desolation].

Just looking at it left Zac's eyes stinging, and he felt his mind turn sluggish as the Dao within tried to erase his thoughts, even his soul. At this distance and with his defenses, it was only a small discomfort. The golden sun was filled with vigor, pulsating like it was about to go supernova. It constantly released erratic solar flares that contained opalescent flames that filled Zac's mind with ideas.

It was clear, however, that these suns weren't purely made from Oblivion and Creation. The vast majority was still Life and Death, just like the rest of the suns in the Red Zone. Zac remembered the visions of the Heart of Oblivion and Spark of Creation. How they'd roved the universe, consuming and destroying to fuel their path. Most likely, the remnants had entered two normal suns, attaching themselves like parasites to siphon off their energy.

There was also a smattering of small moons floating around the two suns, forming a confusing pattern where they rotated around their respective element. Zac wasn't in any hurry to fly over since the island he was on was slowly drifting closer, so he hid and observed the situation. The small moons looked inert, but they gave Zac a dangerous feeling.

As expected, something changed after two hours as a fifty-meter-long bird with beautiful golden feathers emerged from one of the satellites. It released a preening cry filled with the Dao of Life and hunger before jumping off. Zac frowned as the bird shot straight for the unstable sun. He wanted to intervene, but the bird was an Early Hegemon that excelled at speed.

It had essentially turned into a golden streak of light as it shot into the outer corona. A desolate cry echoed through the region before the quiet resumed. A minute later, a scorched and mutated miscreation dropped out of the flames, falling toward the storm curtain far below. Zac sighed as he looked at the burning carcass. The remnant's call of unfettered possibility had probably corroded its mind.

There were no doubt far more creatures hiding within those satellites, resisting the temptations while using the remnant's unique Dao to cultivate. Yet none had moved to intervene, which made Zac believe it wasn't the first time a beast lost control and got itself killed. That was definitely good news. Pushing through those suns to reach the remnants would be difficult enough. It might be too much to handle if he also had to deal with a bunch of Beast Kings.

The island eventually reached its closest point to the twin suns, and Zac jumped off just as it drifted away. This time, he was in his Draugr form, and he released a bloody but not too overbearing aura of the Dao of Death. It was just a bit stronger than what the bird just now had emitted.

It was the best solution he could come up with after some deliberation; show the hidden inhabitants he was strong enough to qualify for a spot on the satellites but not strong enough to threaten the natural order of things. Even then, Zac's heart thumped as two immense auras swept over him, each belonging to Late Stage Beast Kings. They were even more overbearing than the mysterious beast in the Calamity Mountain that had just disappeared when the whole thing collapsed.

The pressure almost made him turn the glider around, but he gritted his teeth and stayed the course. His gambit proved successful. The death-attuned aura lingered a bit longer than the other, but it eventually retreated. Zac had been prepared for a bloody struggle, but skipping that step was obviously preferable.

There was no way he'd be able to take out a Late-stage Beast King without going all out. Even then, he'd likely be left with grievous wounds, if he succeeded at all. Either case, it would mess with the next step of his plan, so he thanked his lucky stars as he gingerly landed on one of the smaller moons. The Dao of Oblivion was much clearer this close to the remnant, but Zac made no move toward the sun.

Instead, Zac dug a simple cave and settled in, ignoring the increasing sense of urgency from the remnants trapped inside the prison. The splinters were especially agitated from being so close to one of their brethren, but the shards were not much better. The second sun was not far away, releasing its beckoning call. Zac let the remnants groan and complain inside their cage. Everything was under control as long as they didn't fully wake up and started to fight.

Zac spent the next five days in 'meditation,' where he only emerged once a day to stand at the moon's surface. It was to get a full view of the sun as it rose from below like a sunrise. In reality, Zac didn't spend a second in meditation. What would be the point? For one, he simply couldn't meditate on the Daos like cultivators or the hidden Beast Kings around him. And even if he could, he was still inside a Time Chamber.

In reality, Zac kept a constant watch of energy fluctuations and auras, gauging the reactions of his neighbors. On the first day, more than ten perceptions locked onto him when he emerged from the cave. After six days, none bothered with him anymore. The auras had stabilized, indicating the beasts had slowly returned to a meditative state. The locals would wake up when Zac made his move, but exchanging a few thousand Mana for a couple of seconds of extra time might be the difference between success and failure.

The rest of the time was spent really observing the sun, formulating a strategy to snatch the remnant within. Luckily, Zac had experience with similar missions and some unique advantages that would put him in a far better position than the unfortunate bird from the other day.

On the seventh day, Zac's eyes opened thirty minutes before his daily outing to witness the sunrise. Everything was the same, but Zac felt the intangible winds of destiny urge him forward. The slumbering momentum in his body had started stirring years ago when he added the last piece to the Omnitool, but it had been too early. Zac had kept things in check since then, but it was no point in holding back any longer. His heart beat with excitement, but he was careful to keep his aura completely steady as he took out the [Hollow Core].

If everything went according to plan, he'd start his Core Formation within the hour.