

The Fall 999

[Chapter 999 - Nomad](#)

Zac felt a palpable sense of *déjà vu* as he looked at the golden storm outside. At least his situation wasn't quite as bad as when he fell into the Twilight Chasm. For one, he still had all his limbs. Secondly, the environment was actually quite nice now that he'd gotten out of the wind. It really looked like the storm was self-perpetuating. The wind agitated the Dao, which resulted in deadly eruptions that generated more wind.

The moment he found shelter, the Dao calmed, though still far more agitated than normal. That was not all bad when kept within reason. Zac felt a dense stream of pure Life enter his wounds, assisting in his recovery. This phenomenon was why the zone was considered worth 250 Mana a day.

It wouldn't be wrong to call the Calamity a deathtrap, but the few safe spots that appeared were havens even top-tier cultivation chambers had difficulty matching up to. It was a great environment for cultivators to gather the energy needed to form a life-or-death-attuned core, and unique treasures were continuously born.

The storm kept raging outside, but Zac didn't mind after confirming the rest of the Stormgliders were gone. He guessed the huge explosion before might have scared them away. Zac's constitution was fast at work mending his wounds, and the rich environment even put him in a semi-enlightened state where he figured out some improvements to a schematic he'd worked on.

A schematic for a healing skill.

[Surging Vitality] had served him well since unlocking the second floor of the Dao Repository years ago, and it had already patched up the wound on his back. However, it ultimately wasn't a very strong skill. It was a Middle Quality skill without any attunement. The only reason it had worked so well on Zac's body was because of his high Vitality and his body's inherent ability to recover. Any skill would have worked great on him.

But [Surging Vitality] had too many limitations. For one, it was incredibly inefficient, requiring way more energy compared to most skills. That was probably why it had been designed to run on Kill Energy rather than normal energy reserves from the start. Secondly, infusing the skill with his Branch of Kalpataru only slightly improved the effect. Finally, it only had a 70% match with his pathways, lowering the efficiency even further.

For years, Zac had planned on swapping the skill out with a proper self-made one that meshed better with his class and Daos. He had mostly figured out what he wanted, and his study of blueprints gave him the skill to create it from scratch. But he'd still held off, waiting for some more pieces to fall into place.

Now, with his constitution evolved and his Dao Branch already at Middle Stage, he had everything he needed to finish the preparatory work. And as long as he didn't wait too long to form the skill, he'd probably be able to push it to Peak Mastery before even leaving the Perennial Vastness.

The storm's ferocity rendered the outside impassable even after an hour, but Zac didn't care. The island had already stopped spinning after the previous blast, and the danger seemed to be waning. Zac already understood he'd been caught in a squall the moment he entered the Calamity. Thankfully this level of

danger wasn't a permanent state, at least not everywhere at once. There were ebbs just like the flow he'd just seen.

Eventually, the roar of the wind calmed down into a constant groan, and Zac hesitantly peeked out from his cave. The wind was still extremely strong, forcing Zac to hold onto the wall, but the air above was no longer an overwhelming golden haze. Now, smaller clouds flitted about in a vast backdrop of a chaotic dance between Life and Death. It looked like he'd been transported to a world of a thousand drifting suns, where roughly half shone in gold and the other half in black.

Between these stellar objects, incredibly ferocious storms raged, just like the one that had almost dragged him away. At any given time, there were eruptions powerful enough to wound even him grievously. And in the middle of all this chaos, platforms and islands floated about like boats on a raging sea.

Some were only a few thousand meters across, while others were so large that it'd take Zac hours to cross them. What kept them afloat, Zac had no idea. There was a slight upward draft in the whole Calamity, but he doubted that was enough to keep whole islands bobbing about. His gaze turned upward, and he saw the same scene continuing deep into the sky until his vision was blocked by an incredibly chaotic storm that seemed an even mix of gold and black.

Being a mostly vertical realm, it would only take Zac a few days to cross the whole thing. The goal was to climb higher, where the energy was richer, and the treasures were better. Certainly, the beasts would also be stronger. Getting to the top was easier said than done. There were only a few safe routes through the huge storm in the sky, so you couldn't just fly straight up.

Things were calmer around Zac now compared to what he saw in the distance. The storm of Life had swept up a lot of the energy in the surroundings, leaving the region relatively calm. Zac stepped out, knowing he had to make his move before it was too late.

Gazing around, Zac shuddered, realizing he was less than one hundred meters from a sharp edge. And he knew where that led—nowhere. Being a literal hurricane, there was a down just like there was an up. Falling meant trouble if you weren't careful and lacked the means to right the ship.

Far in the distance, Zac saw the pillar from where he'd arrived, proving he was still on the starting disk. Normally, it wouldn't have been so easy to spot, but the Perennial Vastness helped out a bit in this confusing place. A huge sigil was hovering above the pillar, making it easier to spot even from other islands. Of course, the guides could always point you in the direction of the pillar in case you were lost.

Zac's eyes turned back toward the edge and then further away, to the storm of Life that had assaulted him for the past hour. Within, Zac could vaguely make out another floating island currently under assault. A deadly hail of rocks raked its surface, each projectile containing the strength of a Hegemon's all-out attack.

The squall of Life had picked up in force while moving between islands, and Zac watched as a chunk over a hundred meters tall was snapped off the island. It was dragged across the surface, leaving a nasty gash in its wake before being flung out of sight.

In the face of something like that, there was only one reprieve; to run for your life. Or better yet, figure out the weather patterns to avoid facing such a squall head-on. If you failed, you'd instantly get turned into meat paste if unlucky. And just getting swept off wasn't much better.

Apparently, the Perennial Vastness had cordoned off the Red Zone as a safety precaution, and the Chaos-attuned storm had formed a self-contained subsystem. There was no risk of being dragged into the more dangerous regions of the Chaos Storm, but the Calamity alone was lethal enough to grind down even Hegemons to dust.

Not even Zac was confident in enduring the unpredictable energy eruptions until he was dragged close enough to another floating island to latch on. And Null was no help in this place; apart from the barrier at the edge of the Red Zone, there were no safety nets. He couldn't just tap out and be brought back to Vastness City if he couldn't hack it.

Zac had already scanned the skyline for his target, but it wasn't there. He'd have to keep moving for a while. Already prepared for this, he took out what looked like a hang glider with five-meter-wide wings. It could be considered a Flying Treasure, yet not. Flying treasures were banned in almost all the zones of the Perennial Vastness, with a few notable exceptions like the Nimbus. But there were some allowed half-measures, such as the item in his hands.

It was made from local materials and didn't have any flight or propulsion arrays. Instead, it only contained a simple wind-controlling array that would allow him to gather and, to a certain degree, redirect the momentum of the winds in the Calamity.

As long as you were careful, it could take you shorter distances between the floating islands and meteors, using the low gravity and upward draft. You risked getting snatched up by powerful winds, but with some movement skills and other treasures, you could often stop yourself from getting swapped away.

Of course, being a zone with a hint of Primordial Chaos, there was always a risk that a storm would erupt out of nowhere.

Zac observed the surroundings for another minute but knew he couldn't dally. The information on the Calamity wasn't endless, but quite a few had visited because the islands ultimately held treasures of Life and Death. Some lucky cultivators even found items containing echoes of Creation and Oblivion. Even if not directly useful for their cultivation, such items were incredibly valuable on the outside.

A series of roars echoed out in his surroundings, and Zac looked on with interest as a swarm of beasts leaped out from the very same platform as the one he stood on. His eyes lit up, knowing this was a good sign. Zac started running, steeling his heart as he jumped off the edge of the floating island, landing atop the glider while holding onto a set of reins to control the wings.

A powerful katabatic wind tried to drag him down, but the arrays activated on the wings. Zac redirected the force and felt himself pull out from the downdraft, soaring toward the island the storm had just assaulted.

The most important lesson in the missive was that while storms and eruptions could happen at any time, the safest place was generally to follow in the wake of a larger squall. Furthermore, the beasts

living on the various islands had just withstood a powerful storm, often many weakened and unwilling to emerge from their burrows.

That way, you could island hop with relative safety, looking for treasure or beasts to hunt. Or, in Zac's case, find a suitable cultivation ground. The migration of the beasts proved the timing was good as well.

After his experience in the Twilight Chasm, flying between islands like this was a bit nerve-wracking. It felt like a current could appear and suck him into the depths at any moment. But it was relatively calm, as far as traveling inside hurricanes went. Even the beasts played nice. Those who needed to move islands wouldn't fight with each other over the chasm. They'd need to reserve their strength.

Zac glanced to his sides, marveling at the scene of dozens of Beast Kings and their E-grade underlings who had appeared out of nowhere. He felt like the vanguard of a mottled army as they all flew toward the closest island. The mix was almost even between undead and living creatures, and most seemed to have adapted to a life without solid ground beneath their feet.

More than half were birds or various forms of gliders like the mantas he'd encountered. One undead creature looked a lot like a twenty-meter puffer fish. It was like a spiked zeppelin gliding through the air. Similarly, there was a den of golden snakes where even the E-grade snakes effortlessly floated in the air, seemingly thanks to a high buoyancy. Only a few seemed a bit out of their element, like a huge toad and a rock-like creature.

Each group had at least one Beast King leading, yet none targeted Zac. They only gave him wary looks before refocusing on the island ahead. They even kept their more feral descendants in line, preventing them from targeting Zac or the other groups.

The creatures of the Calamity could be divided into three groups, and he'd already met the first; the skyborne. The Stormgliders were part of this group of beasts that never touched land. They could live within the energy-dense storms, getting all the nourishment they needed from the environment and the attuned stars. Corporeal skyborne were relatively rare, with most being energy creatures.

The second group was the nomads, also called the storm chasers. The beasts currently surrounding Zac belonged to this group. They were predators moving from island to island in search of Natural Treasures and prey to devour. They rarely stayed too long in one place, only moving on when the resources were expended. Some had real dens somewhere in the Calamity they eventually returned to, while others were true nomads. Some were beasts who had been pushed away from their previous homes and forced to look for a new place to live.

No matter their origin, these beasts had long learned to stay out of the way of other nomads and visiting cultivators, who could be considered part of the same group. They already had their hands full dealing with the other two groups, and they couldn't fall to in-fighting. If too few nomads gathered, moving between islands would become too dangerous. After all, there was safety in numbers.

The crossing only took fifteen minutes, though that didn't mean the distance was short. The raging storm had already passed, but its movement had created a powerful pull in its wake. Zac's flying treasures wouldn't have been able to keep up with his current pace, even if the glider didn't have any means of propulsion.

Suddenly, a twelve-winged winged centipede screeched as dense streams of noxious plumes of miasma started to leak from its maw. Zac frowned as he looked over, his eyes widening when a deep gash suddenly appeared on its body. But the hidden blade had been launched from too far away, and black ichor quickly mended the wound before the centipede unleashed a wave of putrefaction toward the shores.

Where a welcoming party had already gathered.

Apart from the skyborne and the nomads, there were also the territorial beasts—those who had found a place to call home in this chaotic environment. They differed greatly in origin and strength, but they had one thing in common; they fiercely guarded their homes against the other two groups.

Both sides were already unleashing an unrelenting salvo of attacks at each other the moment they came within range. Zac knew he couldn't just sit back—doing so would show weakness to the other nomads, and he'd risk getting ganged upon even if they breached the island. A surge of Cosmic Energy entered his arm, and the gate of [Arcadia's Judgment] appeared.

A huge death spike impaled the wooden hand the moment it emerged, and Zac felt a stabbing pain in his own hand. But the hand of Arcadia contained boundless Life, and the spike crumbled under its force. The gates flew over to the shores, absorbing the Life-attuned attacks while rebuffing those of death.

The whole edge of the island groaned upon being put under such pressure just after enduring the storm, and the already exhausted beasts weren't that much better off. The nomads weren't stupid—they knew this was their chance. They went all-out, launching all kinds of bloodline talents at the shore, and one beast after another was either killed or forced to retreat.

And then came the judgment. The axe slammed down, utterly destroying three Beast Kings in one go. Their bloodline skills were utterly incapable of rebuffing a dual-branch-empowered finisher. The spikes were even more dangerous, being formed of the incredibly sturdy rocks the island was made of. Another five Beast Kings fell, and hundreds of their underlings were ripped to shreds by the ferocious resonance between the spikes.

Even more beasts remained standing, but they had clearly lost their desire to fight. They turned tail and fled deeper into the island, and a few even jumped down and flew toward the islands below. One attack had instantly ended the war, and even the nomads looked at Zac warily as he landed at the shore.

Usually, these encounters meant a tough fight with casualties on both sides. This time, the nomads came out of it unscathed. Zac ignored the looks as he quickly looted the corpses. The Beast Kings right at the entrance of the Red Zone wasn't too impressive, but they still had pretty good bloodlines.

And Beast Cores with pure Life- or Death attunement were pretty useful. Zac glanced at the nomad Beast Kings, who all shuddered and took a step back.

"I guess I shouldn't attack my teammates," Zac smiled. "See you guys around."

With that, he turned and flashed away, heading for the other side of the island. He couldn't waste time hunting weak beasts if he wanted to find one of the drifting Calamity Mountains.