

The Fall 1007

[Chapter 1007 - Greed](#)

The group of four made no move to attack, and the two sides wordlessly looked at each other for a few seconds until the leader of the new arrivals spoke up.

"You are the Draugr who has been making waves over the past month," the man smiled, his eyes turning to the box in Zac's hand. "That thing..."

"Is mine," Zac cut him off.

"Ownership is dependent on strength," one of the mountain man's companions said, and Zac's eyes narrowed upon sensing the powerful spiritual fluctuations emanating from him.

A Mentalist. No wonder the group had hurried over.

"The [Soulhaze Lily] is of great use to my friend here, as you've no doubt guessed already," the mountain man said. "How about this? Two factions guard the trial's exit, along with the solo adventurers who have formed a temporary coalition. A lone cultivator returning, such as yourself, is bound to be robbed of their Spatial Rings upon returning. If you donate the lily and allow me to scan your Spatial Tools for the [Calamity Core], I will personally lead you out of this place. I swear on my Dao; I will not take anything else."

"Or maybe I just join the solo adventurers," Zac shrugged.

"Don't try to play us for a fool," the lone woman in the group, a warrior wielding two identical shortwords, laughed. "Every arrival since the global event began has been logged. We know you're not one of them. What group would let you join without checking you for the core?"

"And therefore, I must have the item?" Zac countered. "It's might still out there, probably in one of these falling mountains."

He wasn't really hoping to sway the group with his words, but these people were giving out critical information left and right. So why stop talking before he absolutely had to? He'd guessed these four were slightly sheltered elites of some powerful faction in the multiverse from their appearance, and their demeanor and language only reinforced that theory.

Of course, that didn't mean these people were weak. They might be lacking in life-and-death experiences compared to someone like himself, but the same could be said to be true for Iz Tayn.

"That might be the case, and you're surely not the only one who was tempering themselves in this realm when the mission was released," the leader said, a small frown forming when faced with Zac's stubbornness. "You may be an innocent bystander in all this. But the Heavens were never fair. The others will not be as generous as I am. I'm certain that the coffin on your back is your main weapon. Why risk losing your companion for a treasure that doesn't seem aligned with your path?"

Zac hadn't been too bothered by the situation before. These people were powerful, but he was confident in forcing his way out. But the not-so-subtle threat to Alea ignited a fire in his chest, and his plans started to shift. These people were asking for a beating, high-echelon or not.

"The young lord is giving you an opportunity here," the Mentalist added, adding gas to the fire. "Don't lose everything because of your greed."

"You talk about greed while eyeing my stuff? While you threaten my coffin?" Zac said with a steely voice as roiling waves of killing intent poured out of his body.

The lingering mental imprint in the walls was doused and overwhelmed by Zac's murderous air, and the whole mountain started shaking as Zac no longer restrained his aura. It rose and rose, a storm to match the one raging outside. Even the Mana-empowered domain exuded by the leader was pushed back, and his smiling visage finally changed to one of concentration.

"What gives you the confidence?" Zac growled as the rattling of chains started reverberating through the cave. "Your backing? Your Mana? This is what I think of your offer."

Zac didn't move to attack. Instead, the box in his hands floated into the air, allowing Zac to open it while still holding his axe. Powerful waves of spirituality blended with his killing intent, but Zac pushed down the scenes of carnage that had appeared as he grabbed the lily.

"What are you- STOP!" the leader roared, but Zac ignored the man.

The Mentalist had even fewer misgivings, launching an invisible arrow of empowered Mental Energy at Zac. It moved with incredible speed, but Zac didn't even spare it a glance as he stuffed the flower into his mouth and swallowed. The arrow moved fast, but the chains had formed a nigh-impenetrable web around him. Two Dao-empowered chains lashed the mental attack, each drastically weakening it before it entered his Soul Aperture.

Zac didn't even need to rely on [Indomitable] for protection. The two huge Soul Spirals were like millstones, pulverizing the attack long before it could cause any damage. Zac barely registered the attack, too swept up in his own world. It was like the time had ground to a halt, similar to when he absorbed a new Remnant.

The real reason was that his mind had kicked into overdrive, with hundreds of thoughts firing off in a fraction of a second. In comparison, reality felt extremely slow. The source was the mysterious lily and the almost unfathomable amount of energy it had unloaded onto his mind.

No longer was his Soul Aperture the vast space with two opposing galaxies slowly spinning. His Soul Cores were still there, but they were drowned by millions of different images—nightmares clamoring for attention and Mental Energy. Zac could understand the shock on the Earth Cultivator's face seeing the chaos he'd invited to his mind. Almost any cultivator would quickly lose their mind from the onslaught, unless their souls were overloaded and collapsed from all the energy first.

However, Zac was no ordinary cultivator. Even in an unstable post-breakthrough state, his soul could match that of elite Peak E-grade Mentalists. Add to that his Heart Cultivation and experience with the remnants, and he could hold onto his sanity without much effort, even if he temporarily couldn't stop the odd distortions of reality around him.

His three Dao Apparitions lit up, and the galaxies in his mind spun faster. The dreams that got too close were swallowed up and refined into a soothing mist that nurtured his harried cores and aperture. Scars

were closing rapidly while the exhausted [Spiritual Void] was replenished. Even his vision started to return to normal.

But the [Soulhaze Lily] was no common object. It was clearly a D-grade treasure, even if it had lost a good chunk of its spirituality when it came crashing down from the Calamity Mountain. Not even Zac's appetite was a match to what was offered. [Spiritual Void] absorbed all it could, and [Void Heart] soon joined in on the feast.

Even then, Zac was forced to continuously release more than 80% of the lily's stockpiled energies through his pores, creating a shimmering shroud around him. Only then did his overdrawn mind settle down somewhat. Zac felt like someone had pressed play on reality again as his perception of time returned to normal.

"Seize him! He might really have the core, but he's out of his mind! He can't be allowed to destroy that thing as well!" the leader swore, and four powerful auras spread out.

Zac only snorted as one domain after another was activated. The shimmering haze of mind-bending madness was joined by the Miasmic mist of [Fields of Despair] and the corrosive darkness of [Deathmark]. And even that wasn't the end. The whole cave shook as a deathly river lined its walls and transformed their surroundings, as though they'd been dragged into the underworld.

A pillar radiating despair and finality rose from the ground, and thousands of anguished faces voicelessly screamed with desolation. Space itself bent and expanded to accommodate the hundred-meter-tall pillar. Zac felt a wave of hollowness in his mind as the last embers of Oblivion Energy were used for kindling the beacon of Oblivion atop [Pillar of Desolation].

It didn't matter. After using almost all of it in his breakthrough, he had far too little remaining to create an Annihilation Sphere. Using what was left to activate his most powerful skill was a worthy investment. The orb of ultimate darkness ignited. Its size hadn't increased since Zac had managed to push the skill to Late Mastery, but it had gained a halo of despair.

The halo spread like millions of invisible tendrils through the cage, annihilating all clashing energies it encountered. Zac himself faded out, his presence erased within the cloak of destruction rippling out from the tower. And as soon as the pillar had formed, one chain after another shot out while expressions of hunger appeared on the pillar's statues.

A battle was inevitable, and Zac had opted for shock and awe. However, these people weren't some random grunts. Not one showed any fear on their faces, though their lazy and confident expressions were long since wiped away. One by one, their auras erupted, creating a counterweight to Zac's interlaced domains.

Interestingly, each aura had an earthy tone that matched the leader's. Even the Mentalist had an Earth-based Dao Branch. Zac had expected to see complementing elements from the Peak of Grand Materia, but they were a specialized squad. It became increasingly apparent why these people wanted the mountain heart, even if it was attuned to Life and Death.

The leader of the four had the greatest aura, and Zac wasn't surprised to sense it was a match to Uona's in raw force. Bolstered by his eighth-echelon Mana, a zone bereft of Life and Death had formed within

ten meters. Zac could tell the fundamental laws had subtly shifted in his vicinity. Only the Daos sanctioned by his path would function properly; everything else would be suppressed.

It was like a weaker version of his [Void Zone], but that wasn't enough to make Zac back down. So what if the enemies had some advantages in that regard? He wasn't the same person who fought Uona all those years ago, and the vast amounts of pure Death in the Calamity gave him a home-field advantage.

Even now, he could feel large amounts of Death-attuned Energy entering the cave to join [Pillar of Desolation]'s deathly river. Some Life entered as well, but the cave acted as a filter.

"Azra formation!" the leader shouted as four axe-wielding wraiths were crushed by his aura alone.

A huge mountain appeared above his head, its height a match to [Pillar of Desolation]. It fused with the Mana Domain, creating a safe haven from Zac's overlapping skills. Simultaneously, he felt an incredible pressure on his cage. The floating mountain had created a resonance with the mountain they stood inside, and the cave suddenly felt like a maw that tried to close and crush his skill.

Thankfully, the effect wasn't strong enough to overpower his skill. It had contained powerful creatures like the Qriz'Ul Goblin King, and Zac had elevated the skill to Late proficiency since. It would take well over a minute before the pressure exhausted and destabilized [Pillar of Desolation], and he could afford the energy expenditure.

That wasn't the extent of the mountain's effect, though. The four chains aimed to bind and drag Zac's enemies into Oblivion were stopped by an ancient aura of permanence. Out of better options, they slammed into the mountain itself like poisonous needles delivering a deadly payload of nothingness. The old chains of [Profane Seal] could drain victims of their energy, and the chains of [Pillar of Desolation] had inherited that feature. With the skill reaching Late Proficiency, it simultaneously destroyed the energy it couldn't siphon off, using the halo of Oblivion.

Apart from profaning the mountain avatar with its aura of Oblivion, the statues started to pull. Zac felt an incredible resistance, but the huge mountain shuddered and was actually dragged a few meters closer. Nothing could resist the pull of Death—it was akin to fighting fate. But the scene only lasted for a second.

The Mentalist sat down next to the leader and formed a mudra with his hands. A pillar of deep brown energy rose from him and poured into the mountain peak. He had become a conduit and amplifier. Suddenly, the mountain was not just an avatar but a representation of the will of the whole island they stood on. It felt like a primordial consciousness was slowly awakened in the mountain's center. Like that, the destroyed energy of the mountain was rapidly being replenished, undoing the work of [Pillar of Desolation].

Zac could tell that dealing with the mountain was key to winning the battle. The leader seemed to be pouring all he had into it, and the others seemed to support him in hastening its awakening. It couldn't compare to the supreme power of [Pillar of Desolation], but its aura rapidly rose.

He needed to make his move, but a pang of danger forced him to phase to move out of the way. A storm of stone shards had appeared where he stood and ripped space apart. Zac didn't even have time to readjust before he felt his mind slow down, this time not because of the [Soulhaze Lily].

It was as though a mountain weighed down on his soul, slowing his thoughts to a crawl. The sensation only lasted a fraction of a second before it was ripped apart by [Indomitable] and his spinning Soul Cores, and Zac heard a groan from the Mentalist. But Zac didn't get the chance to capitalize on the backlash as his Danger Sense warned him of imminent peril.

The sword-wielder appeared right next to him, her aura completely obscured. Zac had no time to worry about how they could spot him through the obscuration of [Pillar of Desolation], and he frankly didn't care. One of his enemies had dared leave the protective umbrella of the floating mountain, making this an excellent opportunity.

A small copy of the spirit mountain floated above her head, and Zac saw how energy streams entered her swords as she swung them in a cruel cross aimed at Zac's head. He could tell this strike was not something that could be blocked with his chains, so Zac swung [Black Death] to intercept. Meanwhile, the rattling chains of [Love's Bond] began their constrictive dance.

A tremendous shockwave erupted as weapons clashed. The warrior was forced back almost ten meters, while the now-exposed form of Zac only took one step back. The warrior looked at Zac with shock, seemingly unable to compute that she'd lost in a clash of pure strength. Zac's face was impassive as he advanced, but there was some surprise in his heart.

The biggest surprise was that Zac had only narrowly overpowered the enemy in a direct collision, even when using [Conviction of Eoz]. Judging by the woman's aura, it wasn't because of her own accomplishments but rather the small mountain above her head. It could be considered a War Array that allowed her to borrow the strength of a mountain and the leader.

But the real surprise was something else. Zac had actually failed to catch the swordmaster with his chains, even when using the Inexorable Stance. Alea's chains had aimed to seal her movements, while [Pillar of Desolation] had sent out another chain. However, they'd all flown toward the huge mountain. It was similar to his old taunting ability, yet slightly different.

Zac's senses told him that the sword mistress was the mountain and that attacking her and the mountain was the same thing. The culprit was most likely the miniature mountain hovering above her head, but knowing that didn't provide any immediate solution. It was like reality had been subverted.

A thunderous crash followed in the wake of the opening exchange, and Zac blanched when he felt his connection with [Pillar of Desolation] shudder. Dozens of earth spears had split off from the mountain and slammed into the underworld river just as Zac was attacked. The leader had made his move, aimed at the cage rather than Zac or the pillar.

Huge cracks spread through the river of the underworld, where one salvo had damaged the seal of his Supreme Pathbound skill by over 15%. The damage would soon be dispersed through the whole river, but it was proof he couldn't underestimate the geniuses of the Perennial Vastness. Sensing the damage and the still-building energy in the mountain proved the fight wouldn't last long.

A swirling halo of darkness appeared behind Zac's back as he grew three meters in a burst. The thick chain of [Arbiter of the Abyss] barely had time to wound itself around Zac's left arm before he reached out and clenched his hand. A tremendous pull kicked the whole area into a frenzy, and even the huge mountain still resisting his pillar was wrenched over a dozen meters closer.

It was like Zac had become a black hole for a moment, and the sword mistress was absolutely incapable of resisting the pull. She disappeared in a burst of instantaneous movement, but the Peak Mastery taunting skill wasn't so easily avoided. In fact, the sword mistress was playing right into Zac's hands.

She appeared just four meters away with a bewildered expression. A veteran warrior, she gained her bearings quickly and started channeling a skill as her swords pointed toward Zac's heart. But before she could launch her attack, the surroundings dimmed. Confusion and fear were written all over her face, and fear turned into horror a moment later.

Zac had already made his move, and the arbiter's chain shot forth like a snake striking its victim.

"Galvo!" the leader roared from beneath the mountain, and the mountain slightly dimmed as a huge earthen blade sprung up between Zac and the sword mistress.

The blade contained incredible force. Zac had already deactivated [Void Zone], but he suspected it would still have managed to force its way through. The blade severed one chain of [Love's Bond] and the conjured fetter of [Arbiter of the Abyss], forming an impregnable wall separating Zac and his target. If Zac hadn't retracted his arm in time, he would probably have also lost it.

The quick reaction allowed the warrior to scramble out of the way, but it was already too late. [Void Zone] had interrupted the miniature mountain and its redirection ability. She had then been tapped by the arbiter's chain, which meant her fate was Zac's to judge. Five whistling sounds cut through the roar of the deathly river.

"No!" the Mentalist screamed, but it was too late.

The sword mistress had managed to block four out of five executions of [Blighted Cut] with her swords and defensive talismans, but the final one had struck true. Zac emerged around the earthen divider just in time to see the woman's corpse fall apart from left shoulder to right hip. Zac only spared her a glance before Zac's abyssal eyes turned to the remaining cultivators.

The fear and confusion on the sword mistress's face during her final moments were now mirrored on the others. They clearly didn't understand what had just happened, why their Mountain War Array had suddenly failed. Furthermore, less than five seconds had passed since the fight started, yet one of their companions had already fallen.

They'd considered Zac a powerful opponent from the moment he unleashed his [Pillar of Desolation], but the severity of the situation had only dawned on them at this moment. They had wanted to sound Zac out while they dealt with his cage, but that wishy-washy strategy had completely backfired on them.

This wasn't a family trial where their background meant something. This was the lawless wild, and they had targeted someone they shouldn't have.

"One down, three to go."