

The Fall 316

Chapter 316: Deforestation

Zac knew time was running out as he rushed toward the sea of puppets. They had no idea what the enormous array in the sky would do, but he couldn't imagine it being anything good. Since Salvation said it was time to join the unity it might mean that both he and Ogras would be turned into puppets the moment the fractals finished charging up.

He also knew that [Chop] wouldn't cut it, even with its recent upgrade. There was a limit to how many puppets he could destroy per swing, and the number was too low to rip apart the endless army in front of him. It was like the mission he received to kill enough zombies in ten minutes. This time he needed to kill to maintain a killing speed that was at least ten times higher.

The function of the special blade from [Chop] was still unclear as it still hovered around him. However, Zac noted that it had barely cost any Cosmic Energy to maintain since he formed it, meaning it might be possible to keep a permanent edge on hand. He needed to explore ways to manipulate it though, as traveling with a five-meter cutter swirling around him would be pretty inconvenient.

He instead put his hopes on his newly acquired skill, [Deforestation]. He received no explanation of how the skill worked when he got it, and there were rather only a few names that entered his mind. But its description indicated it was used as an army killing attack.

So it was with fervent hope he started to flood the fractal on his bicep with Cosmic Energy as he ran toward the puppets. The fractal immediately activated and he finally received a burst of insight, making him understand how to properly utilize the skill. And it was just in time with him arriving in front of the Silver Guards.

"Axe of Felling," Zac muttered as his arm started to perform a wide horizontal swing.

It felt as though he was pushing through a viscous liquid, but to Zac's massive pool of Strength it was only a minor inconvenience, some additional strain on his body. The energies in the surroundings started to churn while a large chunk of Zac's own Cosmic Energy also was dragged out of his body to feed the attack.

[Verun's Bite] only cleaved air as Zac finished his motion, but the swing was only there to summon the real strike. The true effect of [Deforestation] materialized the moment Zac finished his strike, and it moved to repeat Zac's own swing.

It was a forester's hatchet, almost a bit reminiscent of his first weapon, his trusty hatchet that had unfortunately turned to scrap in his battle with Vul. The summoned weapon had a somewhat small head for its very long wooden handle, and if it wasn't for two details one could have thought it was a normal hatchet from Earth.

The first oddity was its size. The hatchet was well over ten meters long, with its head being larger than Zac himself. The second clue to its origin were the fractals that adorned it. There were two lines of inscriptions, one running along the back of the long handle, and the other along its edge.

The fractals along the chestnut-colored handle emitted a sense of imperviousness and fortitude, making it seem the axe would be able to handle any amount of strain without snapping. The ones on the edge

gave off a completely different feeling, and it was one that Zac was familiar with. It was sharpness, the ability to cut through anything.

The fractals' functions might be the standard set that a multiverse hatchet would contain, but they were extremely different from the fractals on a weapon that one might pick up in the System's general stores. They contained a boundless intricacy in their simplicity, and it was clear they contained truths that were well beyond Zac's current understanding of the Dao.

Zac tried to imbue the enormous axe with his Dao of Sharpness, but his mental energy was actually rebuffed when he tried to infuse it. Zac knew he might be imagining things, but he almost felt as though the huge axe disdained his Seed of Sharpness, not wanting to be sullied by such a lowly insight into the Dao.

Zac quickly tried a few other Daos, but the result was the same. The axe finished its trajectory without getting imbued at all, and it was an exact copy of Zac's own swing. The attack was simple and unadorned, but the effect was anything but. Zac first thought the attack was a dud, but soon one puppet after another started to fall apart, bisected in the middle by a clean cut.

First it was one, then two, then hundreds of puppets that fell into pieces before turning into vapor. The silver rivers weren't faring any better as they shattered one after another as well from the forester's axe. The attack kept moving outward and the battlefield was soon obscured in a dense silver mist from the thousands of puppets that were destroyed in an instant.

Zac estimated that over twenty thousand puppets had been destroyed by that one massive swing, but he knew that the effect of [Deforestation] wasn't over. It was not a single-use skill, but rather a skill that ramped up, as long as his body could take it.

Zac hurried forward through the shrouded battlefield so that he could unleash the follow-up swing as close as possible to the remaining puppets. He shot a glance at Ogras while he rushed forward to see that the demon had unleashed his largest sea of shadows yet.

A large sector of the battlefield was shrouded in utter darkness, and puppets were swallowed and destroyed by the dozens every second. Ogras himself was floating above the shrouded field like a God of darkness, shooting concentrated shadows to destroy any silver rivers that tried to flee his sphere of influence.

It was starting to become clear that Salvation possessed some rationality at least, and it looked like he was trying to stall out the battle. His puppets had actually been trapped within the barrier as well, but there was still a lot of room for them to move about.

The mad prophet wasn't trying to gather his forces to charge at the two, but he rather seemed content to sacrifice parts of his army while the runes in the sky kept gathering energy. Zac couldn't be sure, but from the power they were starting to emit he feared that they had even less time than they had hoped.

Zac reached the edge of where the attack of [Axe of Felling] reached, and he once again charged up the fractal representing [Deforestation].

"Infernal Axe," Zac growled, and suddenly it felt as though he was carrying a mountain on his shoulders when he tried to repeat the swing.

His whole body strained to the max as he desperately pushed his Axe forward, and once again an enormous axe materialized in front of him when he completed the swing. This time it was even more massive, with an edge at least twice the size of the [Axe of Felling].

The axe also looked completely different. The last one was a simple axe apart from the line of fractals, whereas this one was clearly meant for war. The head was larger with a long curved edge looking like molten stone, and it emitted an aura of fiery annihilation. Its handle seemed to be created from a burnt-out trunk of some unknown tree, and scorch marks formed dozens of fractals in a seemingly random pattern along the handle.

It was a forest fire turned into a weapon, and as the enormous axe swung an inferno rippled outward in a massive wave of destruction. This attack was nothing like the nondescript killing of the first swing. It looked like a red tsunami that pushed outward toward the puppets, swallowing anything it reached.

The puppets were not only burnt to when the wave consumed them, but the flames actually contained an extremely sharp cutting power. The flames somehow chopped the silver guards into tens of pieces that were soon turned into cinders before the wave passed on. They didn't even get the chance to form the silver mist this time as only burnt chunks were left behind.

Salvation tried to move his remaining puppets and rivers away from the firestorm, but the attack was way too fast for even the more agile silver rivers. The wave kept growing and growing in a massive conflagration, and soon the attack had passed hundreds of meters, leaving nothing but scorched earth in its wake.

Zac had fallen down on his knees after releasing the attack, panting with exhaustion. After the two attacks he had a pretty decent idea of the requirements for the first two swings. The Axe of Felling required somewhere around 500 Strength to launch, whereas the second one required 750.

He guessed that normally only the first swing was meant to be used in the F-grade unless perhaps someone managed to reach the required Strength for the second with the help of [Hatchetman's Rage]. But thanks to his titles his effective strength just about passed 800, allowing him to launch the second swing, though not effortlessly.

But Zac knew that still wasn't the end. There was one more axe one could summon with [Deforestation].

Zac hesitantly looked at the remaining puppets and rivers. His two first swings had killed off roughly a third of the Puppets, where the second swing had destroyed over a hundred thousand puppets alone. The Shadow Ocean that Ogras had summoned would be able to handle a quarter of the original number as well before the time ran out. But that still left almost half of the puppets.

In a perfect world he would repeat the swing of the Infernal Axe a couple of times to rip apart the rest of the puppets, but he realized that this attack couldn't be used repeatedly. The fractal on his arm had dimmed by a large degree, with only a third still being illuminated by a mysterious power.

Zac realized that the attack was a bit like his upgraded axe. The powerful skill had charges, and it needed to restore its energies before it could be used again. Perhaps that was for the best, as Zac felt how wrung out his body was after using the second strike, even with his extreme physique.

That meant he would either need to try to summon the third axe or cancel the attack and try to destroy the rest of the puppets some other way. Salvation still doggedly refused to leave his position within one of the rivers, so using [Nature's Punishment] to finish him off was impossible.

Meanwhile, he didn't feel that [Chop] was up to the task of destroying the well over hundred thousand remaining puppets in short order, leaving the final axe as his only solution. The problem was that Zac wasn't sure he would be able to withstand the backlash from trying to force the ultimate attack of [Deforestation].

However, they were running out of options and Zac could only make a gambit on his oddly durable body. The air around him twisted from a massive surge of power as he activated [Hatchetman's Rage] to push his effective strength to over a thousand points.

The mental effects of the skill were especially poignant with the added effect of the [Splinter of Oblivion] bleeding into his mind since the battle started, and Zac forcibly had to restrain himself from actually trying to bite a puppet to death the moment he reached the defending line of silver guards once again.

"Desolation," Zac wheezed with red-tinted eyes as almost all of his remaining Cosmic Energy was sucked dry in the blink of an eye.

Zac started to swing his axe to launch the final axe, which was called [Desolation]. But he only managed to swing the axe half-way before he was pushed to his knees from insane pressure, one that didn't only affect his body but even his soul. He felt a deep unwillingness to give in as madness took control of his mind, and he used everything he had to push the axe forward.

His muscles tore as blood started to run down his nose and ears, but it actually seemed to work as the outline of an enormous axe started to form. But its true shape couldn't even be discerned before a loud snap echoed across the battlefield, and the axe immediately fractured.

The sound came from multiple bones in Zac's arm shattering due to overwhelming pressure. His strength wasn't enough, even with [Hatchetman's Rage] activated. Zac had hoped that the requirement for the third axe was 1000 Strength, but that clearly wasn't it as he wasn't even close to finishing the swing before his body broke down and his mind was damaged.

But surprisingly the attack wasn't a complete failure. As the indistinct outline of the axe fractured it turned into a hazy grey mist that rushed out toward the puppets. The mist was pretty sparse and only a small part of the remaining Silver Guards was affected, but the result was still astounding.

Anything the anthracite mist touched started to crumble, and in just seconds the affected guards had turned into nothingness. There were no marks, no remains, nothing. Just a complete and total annihilation. Zac's eyes widened in shock as he looked upon the destruction as he lay immobile on the ground, wondering just how strong the fully finished strike would be.

Unfortunately, the mist was only enough to destroy another ten thousand puppets. But sometimes a little bit of luck was all that was needed to turn a battle around.

As a silver river fragmented due to an errant gust of the deadly mist, and a wretched Salvation was thrown out with a pained wail, a silver shield shattering around him. Even the silver arm he had created for himself broke down, turning into blackened motes that dissipated.

Only Salvation himself seemed fine, with his puppets sacrificing themselves to protect him from the effects of [Desolation]. Madness and fear marred the man's face as he looked at Zac with horror, and Zac growled in response as he tried to get back on his feet.

“DESCENT!” Salvation screamed in panic, and the remaining tens of thousands of puppets broke down simultaneously, rapidly forming a sinister cloud beyond anything Zac had seen before.