

The Fall 418

Chapter 418: Undying Legion

Zac kept experimenting with [Undying Legion] and he found that he could infuse the Fragment of the Axe into skeletons as well, but only into the few who were wielding an axe. It appeared they couldn't use weapons that he provided either, which made it impossible to hand out a bunch of disposable axes to improve their power.

But the Dao of the Coffin was a more fitting infusion anyway, so Zac felt it was fine. It didn't only improve their offensive power by a huge degree, it also made them a noticeably sturdier. A couple of the skeletons were ripped apart as they were mobbed by the frenzied parasites, but those infused with the Dao of the Coffin were like stalwart defenders who never went down.

One disappointing factor was that he only managed to infuse 12 of the hundred or so skeletons the skill conjured. He wasn't sure whether this was a limit of the skill or due to him lacking control over his Daos, as Zac felt a noticeable strain to split his mental energy and imbue many targets at the same time.

Being able to infuse all of them would, of course, be preferable, but at least it was a start. It created a few skeleton commanders who could lead their brethren into battle. Zac himself joined the fight as well, taking advantage of his massive frame and weapon to carve a path of death in the hordes.

Zac also tested the offensive capabilities of the Fragment of the Coffin in conjunction with [Vanguard of Undeath], and the fit was just amazing. It did not only make his conjured armor far sturdier, but it also imbued his axe with the same corrosive capabilities as it did with the skeletons.

He felt extremely lucky to have mastered the Seed of Rot from the fight inside the Inheritance. What is he had simply fused Sanctuary with Hardness to form the Fragment of the Shield instead? He would have turned into a mobile fortress, impervious but unable to dish out nearly as much damage.

Now he was a tank who spread death and decay wherever he walked. Black clouds started to billow around him as well, seeping out through the slits in his helmet as though a fire burned inside the miasmic armor. Thankfully it turned out his summons were completely unaffected by the corrosive mists of [Winds of Decay], even though they were neck-deep in it.

One disappointing change to Zac was that he was suddenly unable to infuse the black mists with his Fragment of the Coffin. Ever since the skill reached Middle proficiency he had been able to infuse it with the Seed of Rot, which kicked its corrosion to another level.

But now that the nature of the Dao changed he lost the ability to infuse the gas. Was it because there was no component of hardness to the skill?

Zac felt some disappointment with the development, but he suddenly had a spark of inspiration. If he went by the image of his latest Dao Fragment the corrosive aspect was locked inside the hardness. Zac immediately changed his tactic and infused his lungs with the Fragment of the Coffin instead as he breathed out another lungful of corrosive mists.

The latest gust was clearly different compared to the others. The normal mist was essentially a greyish black, but the new mist also had a greenish hue to it, making it feel more nefarious. His guess had been correct, he simply needed to adapt his thinking a bit to make the skill work.

He made his lungs the coffin, and the skill the aspect of rot that he exhaled.

This discovery did unfortunately bring a whole new problem he had never encountered in his Hatchetman class though. He had too many skills active at the same time. The continuous consumption of miasma wasn't negligible, but the real problem was related to the Dao.

It was simply impossible for Zac to infuse all his skills with the Daos at the same time. The moment he started infusing [Winds of Decay], the infusion to [Vanguard of Undeath] ended. It was also completely impossible for him to split his consciousness enough to add his Daos to the spectral projections for [Deathwish] while using it for other skills.

He was able to juggle the Fragment of the Coffin back and forth between his skills to some success, but he found himself being constantly delayed and losing focus on the battle itself. It felt like he was trying to solve a Sudoku in the middle of battle, making him constantly distracted. It looked like he would have to work even harder with his exercises to improve his mental control.

Still, only being able to infuse one or two skills at a time was acceptable for now, and with everything in place Zac allowed himself to freely rampage across the back of the Avoli. Ogras kept his distance, staying far away from the toxic battlefield Zac had created. It only took him 10 minutes before a deathly silence had spread out across the back of the titan, with not a single living parasite remaining in the area.

Only then did Zac release his skills, surprised to notice that he had less than a quarter of his Miasma remaining. It wasn't due to wounds since he didn't even have a flesh wound from the battle thanks to the armor, but it was rather due to the massive expenditure. If it wasn't for [Fields of Despair] returning some miasma to him he might have turned back to his human form unknowingly.

Zac felt extremely satisfied with the two new skills to his class though, even if their costs were pretty big. He finally started to understand how Undying Bulwark was meant to be used. The first skills had been focused on keeping himself alive in the vanguard of a battle, withstanding both physical and mental attacks.

Then came [Profane Seal] that allowed him to trap his target in an arena that would allow no escape until one side was downed. The Seal itself wasn't that strong on the offense though, as the chains only worked on weak cannon fodder. For example, almost all of the Incursion Leaders had been able to either destroy or push away the chains before they could do any damage.

If it wasn't for Zac's unnaturally high attributes and Daos he would have been forced to slowly grind down his targets with [Deathwish]. He had also been able to shore up his weaknesses somewhat with [Unholy Strike] and [Winds of Decay]. But it was undeniable that both his single-target and large-scale damage was limited compared to his other class.

But that all changed with the final two skills. They added the final missing ingredient to the mix and changed him from a passive defender to a real juggernaut that could change the course of a large-scale battle.

"Had your fill?" Ogras' voice drifted over from the side, and Zac looked over to see the demon walking over, pointedly avoiding going near the parasites melted by the Fragment of the Coffin.

“This undead class of yours is just a cheat,” the demon muttered as he shook his head in disgust. “I’ve never heard of anything like it. How is one supposed to take you down without being a far higher level?”

“Isn’t that a good thing?” Zac answered with a smile.

Zac didn’t need to showcase his two new aces in front of Ogras, especially now that they would have to go their separate ways after the 4th floor. But it served as a good reminder for the wily demon to not have any ideas even if he had become a lot stronger lately with his Shadow Fragment.

Since Zac had finished trying out his new skills there was no reason to linger on the level. They rushed to the front of the Avoli and entered its body through one of the burrows the Parasites had formed.

It looked like the parasites had a somewhat symbiotic relationship with the host, as they doggedly defended the inner parts of the titan. But the two simply blasted their way through until they found the brain of the beast.

Surprisingly it was just a bit over twenty meters across, which felt pretty small for a beast as large as a mountain range. The demon had some fun prodding the poor beast, causing one massive earthquake after another as the Avoli started to buck in pain. Zac eventually had to drag him through the teleporter that appeared after one particularly massive earthquake.

Unfortunately there wasn't anything of value that they could find inside the Avoli, but that was simply how things were. You wouldn't always find treasure even when completing the quest, you just improved your odds of finding something of value.

The following levels went by quickly as well, as the 4th floor still wasn’t dangerous enough to hamper their progress. They also learned that not every single level would immediately throw them into the thick of it. At least not in an obvious way.

The sixth level had for example put them in the middle of a deadly array, and if Zac hadn’t been warned by his Danger Sense they would have had a significant amount of life force drained without even noticing.

But just as the danger increased so did the rewards, at least when they followed through on the quests. One precious item after another went into Zac’s Cosmos Sacks or Ogras’ barrels until they finally reached the 8th level.

The quest this time was nothing special as it was yet another beast tide quest, with the small addition that an upstart force had taken the opportunity to launch a coup in the middle of the chaos. So not only had they guard against the beasts, but they also needed to protect the mayor from assassination attempts.

Completing the level early was also a bit troublesome, as they couldn't figure out if it was the beast alpha or the matriarch of the upstart clan that was the guardian. There was a real risk that killing the wrong enemy would have some unintended consequences, so they found themselves a bit stuck on defense until reinforcements arrived.

However, that was actually a lucky break for Zac as Verun stirred for the first time since they encountered the Beast Crystals after they had stayed on the level for a couple of hours. The Tool Spirit had finally sensed something that it wanted to eat. It was a great sign to Zac, as he had started to worry

that the fact that the Spirit Tool didn't want to eat anything was a sign that it had reached its limits for improvement.

"Can you take care of things on this end for a day or two?" Zac asked the demon who was standing on the wall walk next to him overlooking the sea of beasts.

"What's that?" Ogras asked with confusion.

"My Tool Spirit is sensing something it wants to eat," Zac explained, not bothering to hide it from the demon. "I want to go take it."

"That's fine. Just go," Ogras shrugged. "We are stuck here for another two days anyway unless you're willing to risk it by guessing which one is the floor guardian."

Zac nodded in agreement and flashed away toward the direction Verun's indicated. He waded straight through the sea of rabid beasts outside the town, turning everything around him into a bloody mess. He only avoided the area where the horde leader, a massive demon tortoise, stood, as to not accidentally get dragged into a battle with it.

Thirty minutes passed and he entered a mountain range that was ordinarily a popular spot to harvest herbs and hunt beasts. But now it was almost completely desolate, with all its occupants having been drafted into the beast army.

A howl echoed across the mountains as Verun's true form suddenly leaped out of Zac's axe, and it started sprinting in a certain direction. Zac could only follow with interest, and he was led into a valley with an oddly sparse Cosmic Energy.

A sense of Déjà Vu filled Zac's heart as he looked around to see a bunch of withered trees and weeds all around him, and his suspicions were only confirmed when they reached the middle of the valley. A massive plant as large as a tree stood alone, and a thick bloody scent wafted out from it.

It looked a bit like a cactus or a succulent flower, with an extremely wide base and no stalk to talk about. Each leaf was almost as tall as Zac himself, and they were extremely thick. There weren't any flowers or fruits that Zac could see, but perhaps there was something like that hidden inside the layers of leaves.

Another gleeful roar emerged from Verun's throat as it pounced the plant, clearly wanting to bite into its leaves. But a massive shape suddenly burst out of the ground, and it immediately got into a tussle with the Tool Spirit.

Zac's face scrunched up in disgust when he saw that it was a twenty-meter long centipede, but he still jumped into the fray with his axe at the ready. The area rapidly transformed into a sacred grove as he activated [Hatchetman's Spirit], and Zac appeared right next to one of the beast's segments.

A five-meter fractal imbued with the Fragment of the Axe slammed into the beast, aiming to bisect it in one swift attack, but Zac's brows rose when he saw that the strike was actually rebuffed. The centipede was still thrown a dozen meters away due to the force of the swing, but it was very much still in one piece after the attack.

Zac wasn't disappointed though, but he rather looked at the massive insect like he was looking at a pile of Nexus Crystals. Just how strong was that shell?

