

The Fall 439

Chapter 439: Battle of Fates

Zac briefly wondered if the swordsman had assumed him to be a weakling due to his cluelessness about the Battle of Fates.

A burst of Zac's shocking killing intent spread out as he moved with lightning speed, his axe already falling toward the youth as a storm of leaves pushed away the three hovering blades temporarily. The man's eyes widened in surprise, but the display didn't deter him as a sharp aura radiated from him as he met Zac's attack with the sword in his hand.

A blinding flash of light was followed by a massive shockwave when [Verun's Bite] collided with a golden sword that the youth used to defend from Zac's overhead swing. A small crack could be heard from the man's arm though, and it was obvious he had strained to block the strike.

Zac was still pretty shocked by the guy's power, as his swing was both empowered by the Fragment of the Axe and the titanic power in his arms. But the arm holding the sword was only forced backward a bit before it stabilized again, though the man's whole body was shaking from strain.

This was the first time someone at his level had been able to cleanly block his strike as far as Zac could remember, but he wouldn't give up from something small like that so he immediately geared up for another strike. The swordsman was obviously not interested in matching brute force, and he suddenly shot back almost a hundred meters while the three flying blades prevented Zac from following by unleashing a storm of strikes at him.

Zac frowned and tried to follow using [Loamwalker], but he was for some reason unable to shrink the distance with his skill. Was it the sword pillars who messed with his mobility somehow? He could only move forward the normal way, but each step was contested by a barrage of strikes that kept ripping the leaves of [Nature's Barrier] to shreds.

The swordsman thankfully didn't try to attack Zac from afar while he tried to catch up, but he rather swung at one of the sword pillars right next to him. A hymn of vibrating metals echoed out as the man unleashed a frenzied series of swings.

Zac didn't understand what he was doing, but waiting for an opponent to finish charging up a strike was the height of idiocy, so he started launching fractal blades of his own at the swordmaster every time he saw an opening between the flying swords. He received a few cuts in return, but it wasn't anything worse than flesh wounds.

But the man expertly met the incoming fractal blades with his sword and somehow redirected the force of the projectiles to harmlessly pass by him as he kept swinging at the pillar. Zac finally noticed what was going on. The swordmaster was charging the massive sword pillars with power.

They had looked pretty much like dull steel swords before, but now they gleamed with some unknown energy. Zac had realized the issue too late as the dozens of pillars started to shoot out a cascade of sword beams toward him.

Zac did have the advantage of 360-degree vision thanks to [Hatchetman's Spirit], but knowing where the attacks came from didn't really help when you were unable to dodge. There were just too many blades, especially with the three corporeal blades already harassing him.

Resonating sword waves kept coming at Zac from every angle, and he found himself incapable of blocking them all with the help of [Nature's Barrier] as the leaves were getting destroyed faster than he could create them. He eventually chose to just rush straight through the storm while imbuing his body with the Fragment of the Coffin, but he found himself swinging through air as the target had somehow passed through one of the sword pillars and appeared on the other side of the sword forest.

Zac growled in frustration as he instead chose to demolish one of the pillars, and one mighty swing with [Verun's Bite] completely obliterated it and caused shards to shoot out in all directions. However, Zac felt like he was stuck in some sort of time loop when he saw the splinters fly back and recombine, once again forming an unblemished sword.

Thoughts of retreat started to intrude as Zac looked for a solution, but he stubbornly threw the impulse away. The guy he was fighting didn't have the confidence to win in this Battle of Fates. If he couldn't even beat him, how the hell would he reach the top ten? This was something like a trial for him, proving to himself that he could contend with the elites of the multiverse.

Cosmic Energy surge into his arm as a crack appeared in the air above the battlefield, allowing the hand of [Nature's Punishment] to emerge. Zac wasted no time as the wooden hand formed a seal, conjuring the enormous array that emitted an intense pressure toward the ground.

It was only then that Zac realized a potential problem. Were there punishments to summon in this weird dimension? There was nothing apart from the arena in this dimension. However, he breathed out in relief when he saw a pitch-black peak emerge from the array, bearing down on the forest below.

Those sword pillars were simply too annoying, providing the swordsman with both a powerful attack and an escape skill while also restraining Zac's movement. He wouldn't be able to end the fight while they remained, so he saw no recourse but to go for mutual destruction and sacrifice his forest to crush the pillars.

A stabbing pain suddenly flashed in Zac's mind, and it almost felt like when he looked upon the massive axe in his Dao Vision all those months ago. Zac looked over at his enemy with some alarm, only to see that the swordmaster had swapped out his mighty golden blade with a run-down sword in a simple leather scabbard.

Zac had no idea what was so special about the sword, but his Danger Sense told him that it was far deadlier than the other blades he had so far. He was unable to do too much about it though as he was occupied with controlling [Nature's Punishment] while blocking the hundreds of sword waves that threatened to drown him, but Zac did manage to send a few fractal blades toward the swordsman to force him to split his attention.

However, the blades only made it halfway before they were eroded by the unceasing barrage of sword blades. The fractal edges formed by [Chop] were both larger and more ferocious, but they unable to withstand dozens of collisions.

Zac realized he wouldn't be able to stop whatever the swordsman was cooking up, so he got ready to expend another defensive charge to endure the strike while he completed the attack of [Nature's Punishment]. However, Zac soon realized that he wasn't the target.

The lanky warrior unsheathed and swung the blade in one lightning-quick motion toward the sky, and the rusty blade was back in its old scabbard within the blink of an eye. The only evidence of the attack was a white arc left behind along the sword's trajectory.

The light didn't disappear even after the swing ended, but it rather grew and grew until it was a hundred-meter wide half-moon that rose into the air to meet the pitch-black mountain's descent, and Zac was shocked to see the peak get cleaved in two along with the whole emerald array.

Burning pain seared his hand, and he forcibly ended the skill before the sword arc hit the wooden hand. Luckily it seemed that the swordsman had miscalculated things as well, and he looked shocked when the two halves of the mountain kept falling rather than disintegrating into motes of Cosmic Energy.

A massive shockwave erupted as the two enormous boulders slammed into the ground. The mountain exploded into thousands of jagged rocks, some as large as a car, that flew in all directions with terrifying momentum. The swordsman tried to escape through the closest sword pillar, but he was immediately spat out, perhaps because most of the swords had been utterly destroyed by the massive slabs of rock.

Zac saw his opportunity as witnessed the swordsman scamper back and forth among the flying gravel. He immediately activated [Loamwalker], and immediately sensed that it was no longer restrained. He pushed through the chaos the moment he realized the skill worked, ignoring the twangs of pains from being pelted by the pieces of rocks flying around.

Suddenly he was right upon the swordsman, and [Verun's Bite] was ready to strike.

"Wha-" the man exclaimed as he tried to phase away using some unknown means, but Zac's free hand was even faster as he grabbed the youth's arm and infused it with the Dao of the Coffin.

Zac wasn't planning on hurting the lanky warrior with his Dao, but he made a bet that it would be able to disturb the warrior's escape just like how he was able to stop Ogras from blending into the shadows. His guess was right as the enemy's form turned corporeal again.

The man was no weakling since he had reached the 7th floor, and he wasn't ready to give up just because he knew he wasn't Zac's match in a direct confrontation. A barrage of sword strikes harassed Zac as the man resummoned three golden swords, and each strike came from unpredictable angles and contained a tremendous force.

Zac kept blocking with [Nature's Barrier] and [Verun's Bite], all while trying to get a good swing at the man. He still had a death grip on the other man's arm, but his attempts at pushing him down to the ground proved impossible as the cultivator somehow resisted Zac's force.

But he wouldn't relent either and he ignored any finesse as he used a meter-long fractal edge and delivered one earthshattering strike after another while forcibly enduring the hail of sword strikes. Since Zac had captured his target it had turned into a battle of endurance, and if it was one thing Zac was confident in, then it was his ability to take a beating.

However, he suddenly remembered that he had gained a few new cards, and his killing intent congealed into a spear that stabbed into the man's back as Zac activated [True Strike]. Others wouldn't be able to see the spear as it was only a mean for Zac to control where he wanted to redirect the attention.

A golden disc looking like a miniature shield flashed into existence and radiated a massive amount of power as a necklace on the man's neck dimmed. It covered the warrior's whole back in an instant, defending the man against Zac's 'surprise attack'.

Of course, there wasn't actually an attack coming since the skill only created a threat without any real follow-up. But that by itself was sometimes enough as the man hurriedly back to see what was going on and if he needed to dodge.

The movement only took a split second, but that was all Zac needed as he activated the second fractal on [Verun's Bite] while swinging with everything he had. The distraction had caused a small weakness in the warrior's defense, and that was the difference between life and death.

The fractal edge of [Chop] suddenly disappeared, and [Verun's Bite] slipped past the golden sword as it gained a sanguine glow. It finally continued unimpeded toward the swordsman, and blood splashed in all directions.

"I'm sorry," Zac muttered as his axe bit into the shoulder of the warrior. "I need every point I can get."

Zac could have just as easily aimed his axe to bite into the man's head, instantly killing him, but he decided against it. He had no grievance with his enemy apart from them being competitors in the System's game of elimination. Besides, these people probably came from powerful forces, and who knew what kind of seeds of Karma killing these people would form.

"Shit, just my luck," he said as he reached toward the token on his waist. "Thank you for showing leniency. If you're ever in Asc-"

However, he wasn't able to finish his sentence though as he disappeared from the arena before he even had time to touch his token. His weapons disappeared with him as well, which was a shame since that rusty blade looked extremely interesting. However, Zac suddenly noticed that a Cosmos Sack was lying on the ground where the swordmaster just stood.

He quickly snatched it up and stowed it away as this wasn't the time to go over his gains. Zac's eyes rather looked around for any incoming threats, but no one seemed inclined to jump him as things stood. His eyes locked with a demon who wasn't too far away, but the man quickly retreated.

Perhaps he had seen Zac's battle and felt there were easier targets to focus on first, and Zac looked down at [Verun's Bite] and saw the glow slowly retreat into the second fractal on the handle. Judging by the density of the light he would be able to use the fractal another 3 or 4 times before he needed to recharge it with blood.

This was the resulting upgrade from Verun devouring the massive succulent back on the 4th floor, but he had only been able to utilize it recently as the Tool Spirit had been digesting the various energies it had absorbed. The feature wasn't as flashy as the summoning Verun itself, but it did drastically increase the sharpness of the edge for an instant, allowing a sudden burst of power that was hard to adjust to.

Zac had found that it was extremely effective to combine the effect with [True Strike] as the lapse in concentration of the enemy allowed him to make the most of the short burst in power. If he had used the fractal from the start the swordsman would probably have been able to use one of his defensive treasures to counter it, wasting the effect.

The brief respite after the battle allowed Zac to take a gander at the situation, and he was surprised to see how frenziedly people were fighting. Was there really a need to risk your life like this? Most of these people were scions of powerful clans, and many no doubt had a second climb remaining.

There were still over fifty fights going on, and Zac saw one person after another flash out of the arena, leaving only a Cosmos Sack behind. The scene made Zac realize that there might be some special protections in place, with the System providing last-second saves before they died.

That didn't explain why everyone fought so desperately. Was it about the Cosmos Sacks? The treasures carried around by a Scion of a B- or A-Grade Force were of extreme value for someone like him, but it couldn't possibly be like that for everyone? Was there some other secret to this special level?

Still, many knew their limits. For example, Zac spotted a golem defeating some sort of devil cultivator, and the Golem reached down and crushed its own Token the second it snatched the Cosmos Sack left behind, disappearing with the spoils.

The number of contestants had dropped less half in just a minute, and Zac realized that things might be over pretty soon. He needed to defeat a few more people while there still were easy targets around. But just as he was about to pick a target he felt a sudden gust of wind right behind him, making his hair stand on end.

"Hey."