

The Fall 534

Chapter 534: Blighted Cut

The enormous feline had become utterly enraged by Zac's attack, and it even seemed that the shallow wound had emboldened it, making it think that was the limit of Zac's capabilities. It shot forward over and over, its claws trying to rip through his armor. However, the cat couldn't get through the thick plating, allowing Zac to completely focus on his quest.

His abyssal eyes were trained at the nimble form, his eyes clearly seeing the vibrant life-force rousing in the beast's body to combat the virulence of his strike. It was like witnessing the clash between white blood cells and a virus with his own eyes. However, he was actually able to impact the battle with his mind.

A small headache throbbed in his head as he pushed his concentration to the max, and it look like a surge of death stormed toward the innards of the beast. The cat stumbled on the ground, thrashing in pain from the invasion. Zac felt adrenaline in his body spike, but he still kept his eyes peeled on the animal.

There was some hesitation in Zac's heart about subjecting such a stunning animal to such cruel treatment. However, Zac quickly pushed those discordant thoughts out of his mind as he knew that this thing was anything but a docile house-pet. He had seen carcasses of almost a hundred animals as at the edge of this thing's domain.

Their bodies had been utterly mutilated before they were left to rot. The cat seemed to enjoy hunting and torturing animals for sport, even when it didn't require food. This, along with the fact that it was at least level 85, was why Zac marked it for death the moment he would start trying to complete his quest in earnest.

Most of the kills until now had been for training, whereas Zac saved the beasts that met the requirements of his quest for when he felt he had made enough progress to try for the quest again. He found this animal three days ago, and he would immediately have executed it if it wasn't because he needed some more practice first.

However, the shocking cruelty that this cat had displayed toward its prey wasn't something unique for this specific E-grade beast, though it was a bit more excessive than most. Beasts seemed to grow more ruthless and aggressive as they evolved, with even herbivores gaining a thirst for blood.

Things on Earth would probably be a bit chaotic over the coming years. A second wave of bloodshed would assault Earth's settlements with aggressive beasts trying to take everyone out through starting beast tides like the ones that the System sometimes conjured as a quest. The forces who had survived until now thanks to not having any close-by Incursions to worry about would probably fall by the wayside, while powerful warriors would emerge from the surviving towns.

Things would calm down when D-Grade beast kings emerged, as they were intelligent enough to not mindlessly attack human settlements. They instead set up their kingdoms deep in unclaimed territories, where no humans would dare enter. Even better, they kept their subjects in check, lessening the number of beast tides.

Only at that point could Earth be considered to have been fully integrated; when the energy infusion of the planet was finished, and a balance between races, forces, and beasts had been reached.

But for now, there could be no peace with the animals. If Zac didn't take out this beast now, then it would probably target the people who moved to the town next to the volcano. It had already been determined that the volcano itself was a unique natural treasure that produced something that calrin called an Earth-Fire, a spiritual flame that was extremely beneficial for craftsmen.

Blacksmiths in particular would be able to both increase the quality and quantity of their crafts with the help of the volcano, and it was no coincidence that the zealots nurtured the massive insignia inside the magma itself. If Zac could set up a bunch of smithies here then it was just a matter of time before someone like the Craftsman Brazla would emerge within his sphere of influence.

So all potential threats to this area had to die for the future of his force.

Zac pushed his energy more and more, though it felt just as frustrating as during the Dao Discourse. It was like he was trying to move the clouds with his bare hands, and it was slow and arduous work. However, the cat had entered a frenzy from the pain, discarding its survival instincts in favor of taking Zac down with it.

Sparks flew across the area as the beast slammed into his armor over and over, and trees toppled as the air itself was split apart from its attempts to tear him apart. Some puncture wounds even started to appear across Zac's body as the beast managed to bite through his sturdy armor, but Zac didn't care as he did everything in his power to boost the corruption.

Finally, he succeeded in what he had tried so many times before. The corrosive energy managed to take hold in the cat's heart, and its heartbeat rapidly started getting erratic before the whole organ ruptured. The beast yowled on top of its lungs from the pain before its survival instincts finally overrode its bloodlust.

It tried to flee into the jungle, but it had lost its coordination as many of its muscles had turned into a rotten mess by now. A deep thud echoed across the jungle before Zac felt a surge of cosmic energy. However, he wasn't happy with the result as the stupid thing had actually gored itself on the trunk of a tree it had felled earlier.

Zac quickly opened his quest screen and sighed in relief when he could confirm that the quest actually had been completed even with the abrupt end to the cat's life. He guessed the System passed him because the thing was just a walking corpse with its heart being ruined, and there was no way it would survive even a minute longer.

He wouldn't look in the mouth of a gift horse though, and Zac instead smiled with anticipation as a fractal appeared on his left forearm.

[Blighted Cut] actually took the exact same spot as [Rapturous Divide], though the Skill fractal itself obviously looked completely different. He immediately activated it since he was in a perfect spot to try it out, and he was surprised to find that it was a toggled skill just like [Deathwish] or his mental defense skills.

A small but constant stream of energy entered the Skill Fractal, and he looked around to see what the skill did. He didn't feel stronger at all, and no avatar appeared to fight for him. But he soon heard a corrosive sizzling on the ground, and he found that his axe was slowly dripping a grey liquid that seemed to seep out of the weapon itself.

The scene made him worried for Verun, as the Tool Spirit had shown some apprehension to some of his skills before. However, there were no complaints from the spirit tool at all, meaning it wasn't hurt or uncomfortable. In fact, the same was true for when he used [Vanguard of Undeath].

He had been forced to use another weapon before to conjure the massive black bardiche, but after Verun had swallowed the Dragon Core it had no problem to stomach the corrosive and deathly elements of his skills.

Eager to try the effect of the liquid Zac quickly walked over to the closest tree, and simply pushed the edge toward the bark. The sizzling sound of corrosion quickly emerged from the point of contact, but that was the least of what happened. Ashy-grey tendrils spread across the tree with impressive speed, and it only took four seconds before the tree fell apart.

Only a minute later was the tree a rotten mess on the ground, with almost nothing remaining intact. Zac wasn't done there, and he transformed [Love's Bond] to its backpack form, and four chains emerged like snakes. Zac suddenly felt his miasmic consumption increasing by a large degree, and he wasn't surprised as he looked at his other spirit tool.

The whole coffin had gained a temporary upgrade, just like how Verun turned into a massive Bardiche. [Love's Bond] still looked like a coffin, but instead of being child-sized it turned into a massive box that reached almost three meters tall. It was a lot wider as well, and it completely blocked his whole back like a turtle shell.

Zac had already tried it out before, and he knew that a similar effect would happen when he used the weapon in its shield form. The difference wasn't as startling there though, as [Love's Bond] was able to adjust its size to match his increased stature by itself. It only gained another protective layer from [Vanguard of Undeath].

The increase in miasmic consumption obviously didn't come about from this change though, but rather that he had activated [Blighted Cut]. Each of the chains was dripping with the corrosive liquid all along their length, though the links themselves weren't hurt in the slightest. Each of the chains already contained a hint of corruption, but even Zac felt some trepidation when he looked at the chains now.

Even he would probably be in some danger if an enemy came at him with this kind of set-up.

Just attacking a tree was obviously not enough to get a proper gauge of the limits of his new skill, and he spent the next hour like a god of death in the jungle. Anything he targeted was turned into a rotting goop before he moved on. It utterly ruined the bodies of the beasts, meaning Zac probably shouldn't use it when hunting for valuable bodyparts.

Zac had first thought he had gained a supercharged version of his Fragment of the Coffin, but he quickly learned that wasn't the case. He couldn't combine [Blighted Cut] with skills like [Deathwish], [Profane Seal] or [Winds of Decay], though it was fine together with [Vanguard of Undeath] and [Unholy Strike].

The skill rather provided him with a way to deal real damage while skills like [Deathwish] and [Profane Seal] restrained his enemies.

As for the lethality of the skill, it went without mention. Nothing under E-Grade could withstand a single strike, even when he didn't empower the corrosion even further with the Fragment of the Coffin. A simple scrape when lashing out with [Love's Bond] was enough to condemn them to a bout of excruciating pain before they died.

The only animal that survived more than half a minute was the massive rhinoceros Zac was currently fighting, but that wasn't because of it having some sort of immunity to his skill. He had caught it with two chains of [Love's Bond], keeping it in place. It had tried to run the moment he saw Zac, but it was currently utterly unable to move.

Zac had just attacked anything he came across until now, but he wanted to see the effect of the skill while just restraining an enemy. Zac quickly realized that the effect was clearly worse when he didn't draw blood. There was still a sizzling sound across the rhino's thick hide, but it didn't immediately turn into a pile of rotting meat. It meant that the skill acted more like a venom than an acid, which has an important distinction.

However, that wasn't the real surprise as Zac felt a startling feedback from the skill the moment the beast was caught. Zac immediately followed his instincts and infused the skill with more Miasma, and his eyes widened when three blades of the corrosive liquid appeared out of nowhere around the rhino, each shooting into the beast from a different direction before it had a chance to react.

They each hit the animal simultaneously, and Zac gaped when he saw that the animal didn't even have time to cry out in pain before it had turned into a black pool of goop on the ground. The blades had not only cut the animal apart into six pieces, but it had infused every piece with a terrifying amount of poison.

The blades had appeared for less than a second before they were gone, and Zac barely had time to see them. However, he still had goosebumps on his arms from the terrifying aura they emitted. It felt like just a graze from those things could kill just about anything.

It was a truly sinister skill. Not only did it continuously inflict enemies with a shocking virulence, it even had some sort of execution that only worked when the target was trapped. Perhaps it was a hint of what the future held for his Fetters of Desolation class. Zac quickly looked inward at the skill fractal, and he wasn't surprised that the skill went on cooldown after activating the final strike. Not even the passive effect worked any longer, meaning Zac would have to be careful about using the execution preemptively in the future.

The skill itself wasn't as flashy as [Rapturous Divide], but Zac was still very happy with the result. It was extremely lethal, which shored up one of his weaknesses in his current class. He was lacking in offense, which turned every match into a drawn-out slugfest. Between his coffin and his new skill, he would probably be able to take out E-Grade enemies even faster as a Draugr compared to as a human.

His human form was still superior to his Draugr side in large-scale combat though as he didn't have any way to properly attack large hordes with [Blighted Cut]. The situation was fine with him though, as he

had always felt it a good idea to allow each class to have its own specialty apart from just being based on different elements.

Zac had finally reached his goal of completing his class quest, but he still didn't leave the jungle. He had spent the last ten days almost solely as a Draugr, but he had some things to do here in his human form as well. He had already felt that spending some time in this jungle as a Human might benefit some of his skills, and that idea had only become stronger after meeting David.

So Zac swapped over to his Edge of Arcadia class and started clearing out a perimeter around the volcano. However, he only had time to battle for less than 30 minutes before someone tried to contact him through his Communication Crystal.

"Are you free? Thea and Billy are here, they need your help," Joanna said through the crystal.