

The Fall 585

Chapter 585: Alpha

The burning embers of [Hatchetman's Rage] kept Zac standing through the frenetic absorption from his [Void Heart] as scores of wolves were drowned or crushed by [Nature's Punishment] before the manmade calamity was ended prematurely. Each thump from the Hidden Node caused a bout of dizziness, but Zac forced his mind to focus as he gazed at the remaining wolves.

As for the wolves that had been swept away by the tsunami, he didn't really care. Almost half of them had died judging by the streams of energy that still entered his body, and the survivors shouldn't be in any state to cause any more trouble. Billy and Thea were long out of sight, and Zac felt a huge weight had been lifted from his shoulder. He just needed to keep these rabid bastards at bay for a bit longer before he could retreat as well.

However, he would only escape if he really ran out of options, especially after having activated [Hatchetman's Rage]. He really didn't want to stop while his [Void Heart] still absorbed energy. Something important was definitely happening inside the Node, and Zac didn't want to ruin it at this juncture.

It might be evolving, or it might be fusing it with the extremely pure Dao Energy of the Tribulation lightning to create something amazing.

Besides, Zac still had some cards up his sleeve, though the same could obviously be said about the Alpha. A gibbous moon had appeared a hundred meters above its head, and it was no doubt the source of the earlier beam. The moon was different than the earlier one though, as a single look with [Cosmic Gaze] indicated that it didn't draw any energy from the other wolves. Zac didn't feel any restrictions either, which hopefully meant that the moon wouldn't be able to whittle down his large-scale attacks.

The new moon might have been lacking some functionality, but it clearly had some other abilities to make up for it. Its luster gradually increased in intensity as the alpha howled, and Zac guessed that another beam was incoming. His mind raced as he tried to think of a solution. The last attack was just too fast, and he wasn't confident in countering its speed. The second skill of [Love's Bond] would no doubt be able to block it, but he had already wasted one of his aces for this fight.

It took a lot of resources and time to light up the two fractals of [Fate's Obduracy] after using it against the cultists, and he wasn't sure he'd be able to restore the skill again before he met his real enemies. He couldn't waste limited skills like his bronze spark or [Death's Embrace] against these wolves, as it was just a chance encounter with the wildlife.

Thankfully there were some other options available now that the whole battlefield wasn't locked down.

Zac's arm strained as a massive axe appeared above his head, and the first swing of [Deforestation] was launched the moment that the second pulse of the moon shot toward him. The wave of destruction and the beam of lunar light clashed in the air between the two, and Zac's brows scrunched when he actually couldn't cut through the moonlight.

It was rather the beam that crushed his cutting wave, though it lost almost all its strength doing so. The rest was quickly dispersed by a swing of Zac's axe. The moon itself dimmed considerably as well, and it

shrunk from a gibbous moon to a half-moon. That no doubt meant that the conjuration had more charges in store. But so did Zac.

The Infernal Axe appeared while the shockwaves of the first clash had yet to ebb, and Zac immediately launched it toward the wolf pack. If the Axe of Felling barely fell short, then the second swing should get the trick done. Better yet, it appeared as though the moon needed a few more seconds to charge up its next attack. It gave Zac time to create some wholesale slaughter in the meantime.

A rippling wave of flames crashed toward the wolves, and there finally was a primal fear deep within their eyes. Not even the drowned shrubbery in the surroundings was spared as they were incinerated the moment the Infernal Axe crossed their path.

The alpha was obviously far smarter than a regular beast, and it seemed to understand that its pack was in a bad spot. It released another keening howl into the sky, and the scores of wolves around it quickly followed suit as their bodies started to radiate lunar light.

Zac's brows first scrunched at the scene, but his confusion was quickly replaced with shock as the howling wolves turned into pure light that was swallowed by the moon. Each infusion increased its luster by a noticeable degree, clearly cutting down on the time the skill needed to attack again. Zac couldn't believe what he was seeing.

Not only had the wolves activated what essentially was a War Array before, but they were even able to coordinate some sort of sacrificial skill now. The half-moon released a blinding wave of light the next moment, this time a widespread radiance that was a match to the incoming wildfire in width.

Fiery goutts and white flashes turned the battlefield into a blinding hellscape, and Zac was forced to close his eyes from the intensity. However, [Hatchetman's Spirit] was still active, allowing him to narrowly dodge a series of errant blasts of chaotic energies. A large number of the wolves weren't as lucky, and yet another dense stream of Cosmic Energy was gobbled up by the Hidden Node.

The last round of energy seemed to finally have satiated the [Void Heart] though, and Zac could finally breathe out in relief as the incessant beating stopped. However, the fact that the node didn't seem to demand any more energy wouldn't stop Zac from releasing the final axe. The last alpha wolf was looking a bit worse for the wear, and it couldn't have too much energy left after unleashing these powerful attacks.

If Zac could kill it along with a last batch of elites then he would get a round of energy just for himself, and it would definitely be enough for him to gain another level. Perhaps even two levels depending on how much the alpha provided. That would put him at level 85, and it wasn't completely unheard of to gain some sort of class quest at that point. Most got their second quests at level 90, but it wasn't an iron-clad rule.

The ominous Axe of Desolation took shape above his head even before the chaotic energies of the battlefield had abated, and his arm strained as he begun the third and final swing. However, an extremely scary stream of almost impossibly condensed energies was suddenly spat out of the [Void Heart], and it started to rampage through Zac's body as though it was looking for something.

It felt like a stream of lava was burrowing through his body, and Zac was completely unable to maintain the skill because of the pain. A small gust of the ashen desolation shot out toward the wolves, but it was

a far cry from the true power of the final swing of [Deforestation]. The alpha wolf quickly noticed Zac's wretched state as he was lying on the ground spasming, and its eyes lit up as the remaining crescent moon actually shot straight toward him like a projectile.

"I think I need some help buddy," Zac croaked as he looked at the army of remaining wolves.

An infuriated howl immediately answered in his mind, and Verun appeared next to him in all its splendor. Its eyes were immediately trained on the incoming crescent, and bloodlust shone in its eyes. It released another mighty roar, this time for real rather than in Zac's head, and the forest shook from the power it contained.

The red streaks across Verun's hide shone with a sanguine luster as its mane danced in the wind. Swirls of blood floated around its paws, and Zac felt as though he was looking at a sea of death when gazing at the streams. The crescent was almost upon them, but Zac didn't worry even if he was barely able to remain conscious. His Tool Spirit emitted a haughty confidence even in front of the incoming attack.

Verun actually sent out a crescent of its own the next moment, a massive arc of condensed blood. It clashed with the Crescent Moon the next moment, but there was no explosion or shockwave. The blood was liquid, and it actually swallowed the moon whole as it continued its trajectory. The blood crescent quickly destabilized though, exploding into cascading streams of silvery blood that maimed any wolf it hit.

The Tool Spirit was clearly the one with the advantage, but Verun actually seemed enraged that it didn't manage to hit the alpha wolf with its attack. It turned into a stream of sanguine energy as it flashed forward, heading straight for the core of the pack. A few wolves tried to block Verun's path, but they were quickly turned into dried husks that fell to the ground, causing Zac to be beset by another wave of Cosmic Energy.

A bloodthirsty aura exploded out from the alpha once more as it ran toward the Tool Spirit, and its eyes had turned into two silver moons.

A storm of red and silver erupted in middle of the pack as the two beasts fought for supremacy. Zac himself wanted to help, but he was in no state to even move. He could only make himself as inconspicuous as possible as he hid behind the carcasses of a couple of wolves, spectating the battle from his hidden spot.

Most of his concentration was still aimed at the situation inside his body though, and he was starting to worry when he saw that the stream actually had glommed onto his [Axe Mastery] skill fractal. That skill wasn't all that important to him any longer, so losing it wouldn't be the end of the world. But if that odd stream of energy could destroy one skill, then it could destroy another.

A massive outburst of power forced Zac out of spiritual sight though, just in time to see Verun bite down on the alpha wolf's neck with its oversized maw. Both combatants sported a series of wounds, but the wolf was clearly worse off. Not one of the other beasts helped their leader though, and they just stood rooted in place as Verun started fling his head back and forth until it managed to rip off most of the wolf's neck.

Blood poured out of the dying alpha wolf like a fountain, but it was quickly absorbed by Verun as the Tool Spirit roared victoriously toward the sky. Zac was completely inundated with Cosmic Energy as well

a second later, to the point that he almost forgot the pain he was in. He was about to force himself back on his feet in case the wolf pack went berserk, but his eyes widened when he saw that the sea of wolves lay down on the ground in an act of submission, their heads pointing toward Verun.

Zac couldn't believe what he was seeing. Had these wolves actually accepted Verun as the new alpha after it killed the old one? A few of the more powerful wolves seemed to share Zac's skepticism though, and they jumped the Tool Spirit as one. However, Verun had turned the far more powerful alpha wolf into a bloody mess, so how could these upstarts match its might?

They were ruthlessly slaughtered in seconds, and soon there was not a single wolf who dared to lift its head. Zac hesitated for a second before he started to make his way toward Verun who still proudly stood on the hill overlooking its new subjects. His movement was immediately discovered, and dozens of wolves seemed ready to pounce.

However, a snarl from Verun stopped them in their tracks, but Zac could see that they barely were able to restrain themselves. The instinct of these animals was extremely strong, to the point that their muscles shuddered as they kept themselves at bay. Zac knew that just a hasty movement would be enough to set them off, no matter how much Verun ordered against it.

It was a shame as thoughts of domestication had entered his mind when he saw the situation unfold. Who would say no to a powerful pack of E-Grade wolves who could do their bidding? Having them would be far more effective than the Barghest who had essentially turned into training fodder for the young cultivators of Port Atwood.

His only hope was that the wolves were overly excited from the battle and all the blood, and that they would be easier to domesticate after things calmed down.

"Good Job," Zac smiled as he patted the Tool Spirit, not caring at all about his hand being drenched in blood of the alpha wolf. "Do you think you can keep these guys under contr-"

He didn't get any further though as the sound of a tremendous heartbeat rippled out from his body. Verun yowled in surprise and took a step back, and the nearest wolves seemed to have been physically impacted from it as blood started pouring out of their mouths and ears.

Zac himself was shocked to see that the terrifying stream of energy of before was just the first half, and second part had just been expelled from the Hidden Node. He was barely standing upright with the original force in his body, and he felt the same sort of despair now as when he saw the Tribulation Lightning coming for him.

This was too much for him to handle.

"Protect me," Zac only had time to say before his Hidden Node beat again, causing the two streams to join up and slam into his soul.