

## The Fall 340

### Chapter 340: Battle of Attrition

Just as Zac was unsure of how to proceed against the seemingly impenetrable battleroach king the two arrays above the beast lit up once more. Zac immediately moved the bulwark to his front again, but his brows rose in alarm when he saw dozens of small emerald embers rush out every second, each flying toward him as though they were alive.

The moment he saw the quick turns and amazing speed of the small motes of light Zac realized that he never would be able to block them all, and he wouldn't be able to flee either. Instead, he could only infuse himself with the Dao of Hardness while getting his defensive treasures ready just in case.

The first ember flashed around the large bulwark to slam into Zac's chest, and Zac was relieved to realize that while it was painful the attack only caused a superficial wound that would heal by itself soon enough. Another specter appeared again in response to the attack, once again swinging down at the tough back carapace, though with far less power compared to the last one.

Zac realized that his skill considered the array as the source of the attack, rather than the battleroach. Otherwise it would have aimed for the softer belly instead. But as he saw [Deathwish] once again failing to cause any damage he had an inspiration.

The next moment one light after another slammed into him, each causing a small wound on his body. The area above the battleroach was immediately filling up with scores of specters that charged its impervious back plating. However, the appearance of some of the specters soon started to change, taking on a murky green tinge.

Elation flashed in Zac's eyes as he endured the energy barrage. His idea had proven successful. While [Deathwish] was still in early mastery he had no connection to the projections that were created, but now things had changed. Since there was a connection Zac realized he might be able to infuse the ghosts with his Dao to empower the strikes.

His idea had proven correct, though Zac only managed to infuse some of the rapidly appearing ghosts. His control of mental energy was still not too impressive, and the window to imbue the ghosts seemed to be shorter than a second. He tried to utilize his earlier lesson about only retaliating to some of the attacks, but his mind was already too occupied with the Dao infusion, so he could only let the skill keep running.

The reason the ghosts turned a murky green was that Zac had chosen to imbue all the specters he could with the Dao of Rot. He realized that if he couldn't even break through the shell while wielding [Verun's Bite], then there would be no way to do it with the far weaker attacks from [Deathwish]. But what if he could whittle down the beast in another way?

Zac had already learned that the effect of the Seed of Rot was stacking, and he hoped to accumulate enough rot on the shell to affect the beast. The rapid-fire attacks of the arrays were luckily an excellent way to apply the Dao of Rot over and over, and in just moments the emerald mists around the battleroach had turned a shade darker from Zac's Dao.

Of course, this didn't come without a price. His whole body was covered in flesh wounds and black ichor, and his Miasma was getting drained at a terrifying rate. It was starting to get to the point that Zac was getting unsure whether he would still be standing before his plan would even come to fruition.

However, the exchange seemed to not only drain Zac's reserves. The two arrays soon dimmed down and sank into the body of the battleroach king again. Zac's eyes tried to glean any change in the beast's demeanor, but from what he could tell it was the same as before. The shell still looked as imperious as before, apart from having a slightly darker tint.

The beast looked at Zac as well and its layered protection once again started to slowly fan up and down. Zac glared back at the beast before taking out a healing pill. The two reached a stalemate of sorts, each party perhaps surprised at the power and resilience the other exhibited.

But the stalemate only lasted for a few seconds before both once again exploded into action. Zac slammed his shield into the ground, causing a wave of sharp spikes to erupt in a wave toward the incoming beast. The battleroach didn't falter the slightest, and rushed into it headfirst, crushing the spikes without any trouble.

A few spikes managed to topple its balance, but it was soon upon Zac once again. This time Zac didn't try to block its mandibles with his shield, and instead weaved beneath the beast. The legs' razor-sharp blades flashed all around him as he desperately blocked as many attacks as he could while retaliating with a rot-infused axe over and over. Now and then he tried a surprise-strike at the joints, but the emerald energy shield kept appearing to block any damage.

The brutal melee kept going for minutes as the two unleashed a storm of blows at each other that would render most people crippled. But Zac had truly met his match in endurance this time. The glistening emerald carapace held steady against Zac's assaults, even though Zac mostly tried to hit the same spot over and over.

Soon twenty minutes had passed and Zac was forced to consider means of escape. He was running dangerously low on Miasma, and his head was already pounding from constant use of multiple Dao Seeds. He was even considering using his [Void Ball] in a bid to end the fight, even if he was certain that would mean failing his class quest.

But a change finally took place in the battle as the battleroach king wildly swung its head to impale Zac on its horn. But the aim was completely off, and Zac was surprised to see that the beast started to stumble as though it was drunk.

His gambit seemed to finally have taken effect. The Dao of Rot might not have worked very well against the inorganic carapace of the battleroach, but mists of putrefaction still covered the area around the strike. This mist got mixed up with the emerald haze stemming from the treasure mushroom, which the beast constantly absorbed. It looked like the compounding effect of Zac's rot finally eclipsed the beast's natural regeneration.

The battleroach screeched in anger as its legs buckled and it desperately tried to get back on its feet. But the effect was only getting worse, and soon green liquid started to leak through the gaps in the shell as the beast's innards were rapidly rotting away.

Perhaps this was enough to kill the beast in due time, but Zac ran out of patience after waiting another 10 minutes. He walked over with his axe as his arm slowly swelled to ridiculous proportions. The battleroach feebly tried to bite down at Zac, but its coordination was completely ruined by now.

Zac easily passed its large head to reach the insect's neck, and with a roar swung down his axe with all the strength he could muster. An emerald shield appeared above the joint as before, but it had lost its luster and was incessantly flickering. The white head of [Verun's Bite] ripped through the shield like dry wood, and Zac finally managed to land a true strike.

A flood of energy entered his body almost immediately, and Zac sat down a few meters from the killed beast in exhaustion. He immediately took out two Miasma crystals, too tired to even move. He sensed the impartment of a new fractal on his body, but he was in no state to look into it at the moment.

It was only two hours later he opened his eyes. He was still extremely tired, but a somewhat pressing matter had interrupted him. The large carcass of the battleroach king kept leaking a nauseating goop through the cracks, and by now it had created a fetid pool around it that almost reached Zac's resting spot. Zac put the large carapace away with some disgust before moving over to the mushroom.

He still hadn't received his reward from Ascension breaker yet, but he guessed it would complete when he harvested the mushroom as it was still protected by the System's defensive shield. Just as he expected the golden shield disappeared when he got close, but Zac's eyes widened in alarm when there was nothing inside. The spot where the mushroom had been rooted was empty, apart from a hole reaching into the ground.

But Zac soon breathed out in relief when he saw the two boxes right next to him. They had appeared completely noiselessly without a single energy fluctuation just like his rewards from earlier quests. The larger of the two boxes was made from light-grey stone and inlaid with golden fractals, and it was almost as tall as Zac was.

There was no doubt that the box contained the mushroom, and Zac was more than happy that the System had packaged it for him. Properly harvesting and storing spiritual herbs was a skill in of itself, and he was afraid that he would ruin the mushroom if he simply ripped it out of the ground.

The other box looked like a small jewelry box made out of pitch-black wood. Zac stored the larger box in his Cosmos Sack, instead focusing on the smaller one. As he expected a small crystal was placed inside and Zac immediately took it up to scan its contents.

Zac had been worried that the System would award him something that didn't suit his needs, but it looked like he had been too suspicious. The skill was called [Winds of Decay], and Zac didn't hesitate to learn it. It sounded like something that would be a nice addition to his current class, and perhaps he even got this specific skill because of the way he managed to take down the battleroach.

The fractal found a position at the top of his lungs, right below the area that was being occupied by [Thousand Faces]. Having already gotten a few skills from outside sources he could tell that while the fit wasn't amazing, it wasn't too bad either. He believed the new skill should be able to display at least 70% of its true power when he used it.

Zac had restored less than a third of his energy the past two hours, but he couldn't stop himself from trying out the skill. Miasma effortlessly entered the fractal, but there was no effect apart from the

miasma changing somehow. He tried to move the energy to his arms to release the skill, but the energy wouldn't budge. Zac frowned as he looked down at the small crystal in his hands until he had an idea.

Fresh air entered his lungs for the first time in days, as he took a deep breath even though he didn't need to breathe in his undead form. The energy from [Winds of Decay] entered his lungs as well, making Zac certain he was on the right track. A dark gust billowed out when he exhaled, immediately covering an area of over fifteen meters in no time.

Zac was happy that the skill worked, but he couldn't stop himself from grimacing. Did the System really give him a bad-breath skill? Zac shook his head with a wry smile and instead turned his attention to his class skill, [Profane Seal]. He needed something to cleanse the proverbial bad taste in his mouth after getting the last skill. A burst of information entered his mind when he focused on the other fractal, but Zac didn't even have time to celebrate before a change occurred in the cave.

A sudden sound threw any thought of experimenting with his other skill into the back of Zac's mind, and he whirled around with his axe ready. What entered Zac's sight wasn't one of the remaining battleroaches having found its way down from the floors above. It was something else entirely.

A small humanoid stood in the inner corner of the cave, almost on the opposite side of where Zac entered. It was roughly a meter tall with large two black eyes on a head that looked pretty large for an otherwise lithe frame. If it wasn't for the small horns and the tail Zac would have classified the being as a traditional alien, for lack of a better name.

There were other strange things with the alien apart from the fact that it had somehow found its way down into the cave without him noticing. Two small drones of clearly technological origin hovered above its head, and it looked like he was holding some sort of device in his hand that was more akin to a tablet than some system-approved weapon. Its clothes also didn't follow the style of most battle-gear, and it looked a bit like a modern Chinese Tang suit.

Zac was frozen in shock seeing the unexpected arrival, but the same could be said about the alien. It stood unmoving a few meters into the cave, looking back and forth between the center of the cave and the battle-worn appearance of Zac.

Finally the silence broke as the two spoke up at the same time.

"Draugr?"

"Technocrat?"