

The Fall 345

Chapter 345: Drones

Zac was ready to go, but Ogras held up a hand to stop him before he rushed out into the wilderness.

"You should know that this mission has a pretty decent risk of failing. The Technocrats possess all kinds of tools that don't really conform to the conventional grading system," the demon said.

"What do you mean?" Zac asked with confusion.

"I mean that their technology can be pretty hard to predict. For example, their shields might be way stronger than the arrays we have encountered, or we might be immediately spotted even if we try to sneak in. I have no idea whether my shadows can fool their detection devices," Ogras explained.

"We'll just have to see how it goes," Zac sighed. "I guess I'll swap over to my Draugr form before we go."

"Uh, I think your other class might be more useful in an all-out assault," Ogras said with some skepticism in his eyes. "This might not be the time to look for more levels."

"I am afraid their devices will detect that I might be part Technocrat, so better that I use my Draugr body," Zac explained.

"Paranoid, I like it," Ogras nodded in appreciation. "Well, in any case. I'll fight with you, but I am not throwing my life away for your vendetta."

"I know, just do what you can," Zac agreed.

The two started to run through the dour landscape, both pushing themselves as much as they could while maintaining combat readiness. As they ran Ogras took the opportunity to update Zac on what had been going on in the underworld during his days of training.

The wealth that the merchants had amassed was extremely impressive, but unfortunately it looked like many of them had chosen to hide their wealth rather than carry it around. None of them were powerful fighters, so a common fear had been that their Cosmos Sacks would be snatched without them being able to fight back.

A few of the burrows had been found, but a lot of wealth was still unaccounted for. It had turned into somewhat of a treasure hunt, as whoever found a cache would be handsomely rewarded. Ogras had also received word that Emily finally found her sister, who turned out to be a captain under one of the Councilors. The teenager was staying with her for now, catching up on the lost months.

Their day was pretty uneventful otherwise. Between Ogras' stealth and Zac's towering aura, the wildlife left them alone, allowing them to keep running in peace. It was only after running for almost 40 hours straight did they stop and made camp in a small cave.

"The reports stated that there have been signs of activity in this direction. The resources in the area have been excavated, and scouts have gone missing. There haven't actually been any sightings of the Technocrats, apart from a mention of a red light in the distance," Ogras explained as he took out a map. "But it this can only be the place, especially considering that heretic you killed had time to visit the cavern."

“That some parties managed to walk unencumbered through the area should mean that they haven’t bugged the place. Those who got killed probably just got unlucky and encountered the Technocrats,” Zac deduced.

“Probably,” Ogras agreed. “Or that they ventured too far. In any case, these reports are over a month old. Hopefully the heretics have finished draining the resources in this area, allowing us to get close to their base without them noticing. But that leaves the matter of how we’ll deal with the Incursion itself. There’s only two of us and you’re using that class.”

“I can take care of the five E-Grade warriors as long as they are close to each other,” Zac said “I have a new skill that’s pretty convenient for such a scenario. But you should make sure to keep some distance from me.”

Ogras looked over with interest, slowly nodding in agreement.

“What about the rest of the Technocrats?” the demon asked.

“Leave no one alive. Kill everyone as quickly as possible. Let no one contact their homeworld,” Zac said.

A ruthless grin spread across Ogras face when he saw Zac’s resolve. It looked like he couldn’t wait to start fighting, which was a bit surprising considering the demon’s earlier misgivings.

“Why are you so eager?” Zac asked with confusion.

He was more than happy that the demon seemed motivated to help out with this problem, but he was a bit skeptical about it. The demon never threw himself into danger unless there was something in it for himself.

“You should know that most forces in the multiverse, including the demons, are in a passive state of war with the Technocrats,” the demon smiled. “But do you know why?”

“Isn’t it because they want to destroy the System while you want to keep it?” Zac answered with a raised brow.

“Well, it’s part of the reason, but the Technocrats are crazy powerful. Normally people wouldn’t want to mess with them. However, there’s another reason from what I’ve gathered. The technocrats hate the Ruthless Heavens, but the Heavens hate the Technocrats just as much it seems,” the demon grinned.

“What? Isn’t the System like an unfeeling program?” Zac blurted out in confusion.

“Well, The Ruthless Heavens at least have some sense of self-preservation I guess,” Ogras shrugged.

“According to rumors it brings all kinds of benefits if you take out the Technocrat heretics. For example, it counts as great achievements, which will help with Class Evolutions. I’m sure taking out one of their Incursions will bring amazing benefits.”

Zac could only gape in response. It was truly a ruthless move by the System if what Ogras said was true. A lot of people were ready to do almost anything to push themselves forward on the path of cultivation. There were innumerable people stuck at one bottleneck or another, so it was no surprise that many forces would fight the Technocrats tooth and nail if it could help them break through.

It would also explain why they didn't expose themselves while in the underworld. They could have gained a lot more resources if they started raiding some settlements. But perhaps the Technocrats were afraid that the other invaders would drop everything to hunt them for merit.

"So I guess there's nothing good that can come from pissing off the System," Zac said with a shake of his head.

"Well, I don't think The Ruthless Heavens has time to listen in on ants like us in any case," Ogras grinned. "In any case, I squeezed some things out of the hands of Smaug. I have two of those balls that disrupt teleporters. I am not sure whether they work on Nexus Hubs though."

"Nice. Anything to blow any shields open?" Zac asked.

"Unfortunately, no. I have a few offensive trinkets that should cause widespread carnage though," Ogras said. "If nothing else works we'll have to use your [Void Ball], though avoid it if possible. Even if we break the shield we might not be able to pass because of the spatial tears."

The two discussed various strategies for a bit longer until they finally came to a decision. They would try to sneak inside the Technocrat territory relying on Ogras' shadows. After the battle ensued Zac was responsible for taking down the powerhouses, whereas the more mobile Ogras would be responsible for taking care of the others.

The two immediately set out, keeping to the shadows as they started to traverse the area that was presumed to be claimed by the Technocrats. Thirty minutes into their travels Zac saw clear signs of excavation, with the ground having multiple symmetrical holes leading into the darkness. However, there were neither men nor machines active in the area, allowing the two to breathe easy.

Another hour passed as the two started to move slower and slower, carefully scouring the shadows and the sky for any hints of Technocrat activity. Their carefulness was finally awarded as they spotted a small hovering ball in the distance.

It was the size of a tennis ball and pitch black, almost seamlessly blending into the surroundings. It didn't move or make a sound, only silently floated in the air. Neither Zac nor Ogras had seen such a thing before, but it was easy to assume it was either some sort of surveillance drone or a floating mine.

Ogras looked over questioning at Zac, who motioned the demon to keep going. This would be a test to see if they could pass the sentry unnoticed, or whether it could see through the shroud of darkness. It would greatly impact how they would act in the rest of the assault. The two crept forward, with Ogras completely covering them in dense layers of shadows. They slowly moved closer and closer, making no attempt to avoid the drone.

The drone seemed completely oblivious to their existence until they came within a few hundred meters of it. At that moment it moved with shocking speed to stop right above them, and a mesh of red beams started to run over the ground. Zac's eyes widened and he immediately indicated for Ogras to destroy it.

A beam of shadows, almost completely invisible in the darkness of the Underworld, shot up and ripped a hole through the small ball. It immediately fell out of the air and some unknown energy inside it caused a few flickering discharges. But by the moment it thumped into the ground it looked completely dead, which wasn't a surprise since only its shell remained after getting impaled.

"So much for stealth," Ogras muttered, looking down on the drone with some interest. "Perhaps it would have worked if we had Janos with us, but a moving blob of shadows won't fool the machines."

"It looks like it covers the area of a square kilometer or so," Zac added thoughtfully.

"Perhaps we can circumvent the others with distance, but they should already know this thing is broken," Ogras said as he poked the destroyed ball by their feet. "What now?"

"We'll keep going as earlier," Zac said. "They might not care too much about one destroyed drone. It might have been a beast for all they know since we never exited the shadows. But if we meet more of these things we'll have to rush it."

"Yeah, one or two might be okay, but any more than that they'll definitely understand that something is up," the demon agreed as they kept moving forward.

Just a few minutes later they spotted another ball in the distance, though they were able to avoid its detection by taking the long way around it. But that orb was just one of many and they soon found themselves stuck. If they wanted to keep moving forward they would either have to enter the field of vision of one of the orbs or start destroying them.

"There's no way we'll get to their base unannounced," Ogras said with a shake of his head.

"Then we'll have to speed up. Destroy all the orbs so they at least don't know what's coming," Zac sighed.

The demon nodded and the two immediately sped up. Any drones that came within Ogras' reach was instantly destroyed, causing one subdued explosion after another. Zac started to feel a bit shocked as they ran, as there were just so many of them. Ogras had destroyed close to a hundred after running for just a few minutes, but that was only a fraction of the inescapable net that the Technocrats had created. A conservative estimation by Zac put the number of drones at five thousand at the minimum.

Soon enough the behavior of the drones started to change, as the unmoving sentries by the sides started to fly toward them one after another. It looked like the Technocrats had finally realized something was up and started to control the movements of the flying scouts. The two of them had still avoided getting scanned by the red lights, but their path of movement could easily be plotted by following the destroyed machines.

"Something's coming," Ogras suddenly said, looking into the distance with a frown.

"Shit!" Zac said when he saw what Ogras was talking about.

It was four machines that were suspiciously similar to the two drones that accompanied the Technocrat in the battleroach cavers, with the notable exception that they were twice as large.

"Dodge!" Zac shouted, as even he didn't want to block four of those beams at the same time.

Ogras grabbed Zac by the arm, and the next moment the two disappeared in a sea of shadows, only to appear fifty meters away. Just a moment later the four beams converged at their earlier spot, and the effect of the four beams was terrifying. Each lance of energy was powerful enough to incinerate the air, and even space itself seemed to be unable to handle the four attacks converging. The area where the

beams had ripped through kept twisting and distorting even after the attacks, only stabilizing a few seconds later.

"What is that?!" Ogras spat when he saw the power of the beams, clearly starting to regret accompanying Zac on this venture.

"That's the Technocrats for you," Zac sighed as he got ready for battle.