

The Fall 348

Chapter 348: Man Versus Machine

"Defend!" one of the Technocrat warriors screamed, and battle drones pushed forward to block the rapidly closing hole in the shield.

"I'll go right," Ogras said from behind before swirling forward in his shadows and effortlessly passed the machines.

Zac grunted and pushed forward as well, though missing the demon's grace. He stomped forward like an angry bull, tanking a few beams the drones launched at him as he squeezed through the regenerating shield.

The main weapons of the landbound war machines were energy beams just like the drones, though they were able to rapidly attack in exchange for a far weaker power. Getting hit left smarting scorch marks on Zac's body, but it would take a whole lot of attacks of that caliber to take him down.

A black storm heralded his arrival as Zac unleashed [Winds of Decay] the moment he got through the shield. The corrosive cloud did not only cloud the enemies' vision, but pained screams echoed in the vicinity as some of the warriors fell down in anguish. It was the Technocrats who did not possess any corrosive protection, and Zac felt streams of energy starting to enter him in just a few seconds.

"Stand down! We work for Firmament's Edge. If the two of you don't back down this instant we'll be forced to report your actions to our superiors," a shout came from the distance, and Zac looked through the haze to see the Technocrat leader staring at him.

"The Undead Empire goes where it pleases," Zac shouted back. "You heretics of the Boundless Path can never live under the same sky as us."

Zac didn't know if his words would ever reach Firmament's Edge, but he felt it was prudent to throw the blame on the Undead rather than the people of Earth just in case. As for the Boundless path, he had no idea what that actually was. But if that was what the System called the Technocrats, then it could only be accurate.

Zac asked Ogras during their earlier approach, but the demon wasn't sure either. Perhaps Heaven's Path and the Boundless Path were things that ants like them weren't qualified to know about just yet. Of course, that was why Zac used those words rather than calling the Technocrats invaders or something similar. He wanted to act as a Draugr elite to sow some confusion.

The technocrat kept shouting for Zac to stand down, but he didn't personally take action just yet. Zac chose to ignore him after the initial exchange, instead using his mouth to keep drowning the area in corrosive clouds.

Unfortunately quite a few of the Technocrats seemed to possess some sort of defensive gear that created a personal barrier that kept the mist at bay, and the clouds were kept at arm's length. Almost all the machines were fine as well, with their durable hulls completely sealed to protect the more vulnerable innards.

The skill was just a means for Zac to cause some chaos though, and he was surprised that it managed to melt a few of the machines at all. He instead relied on his axe to cut down anything in his path. Neither the Technocrats nor the machines could last more than a hit or two, allowing him to gain a steady stream of miasma through [Fields of Despair].

Zac's rampage started to put the fear of God into the Technocrats, and no one seemed willing to get within melee range any longer. The humanoids donning the exoskeletons could only stand to the side and spectate Zac and Ogras dismantling their mechanized military.

The machines were going completely berserk though, and tens of them rushed forward to heedlessly throw themselves at Zac. He didn't mind at all and crushed all the machines as they came. But he only had time to deal with half of the frenzied assault when his mind screamed of danger.

Zac didn't hesitate and immediately entered his turtle-stance by jumping down on the ground with [Immutable Bulwark] forming a protective layer above him. The next moment his whole vision turned white as something bombarded him from above, turning all the nearby machines into shrapnel in its effort to take Zac down as well.

Luckily it only cost him some miasma and caused some ringing in his ears since he reacted in time. Zac immediately jumped up to his feet and ran through the inferno to see one of the two large robots standing in the distance, streams of smoke rising from its back. Zac couldn't be sure, but he had a feeling that the mecha had launched some sort of sneak attack while he was occupied with the smaller war machines.

The ground cracked under Zac's feet as he started to rush forward, his bulwark once again paving the way by mowing down everything in his path as he targeted the huge robot. It seemed to have anticipated Zac's approach, as it calmly raised one of its arms toward him. Its forearm started to transform with a clinking sound, rapidly turning into dozens of pipes aimed in Zac's direction.

Zac frowned when he saw the sight, and another gust of black mist covered Zac and his surroundings as he unleashed some more corrosive clouds. The moment he was covered he slightly changed his approach, wanting to flank the robot instead of rushing head-on.

The robot didn't seem to care in the slightest, and the concentric circles of barrels steadily started to light up, each one of them shuddering with power. The air twisted around the arm of the robot until an enormous shockwave blew Zac's [Winds of Decay] far away, cleanly exposing his position. A second shockwave erupted as tens of glowing lights were launched toward Zac.

They looked extremely familiar to the attacks that the Battleroach King had utilized with the help of its arrays, making Zac wonder if one was influenced by the other. The Technocrat had mentioned that he had infused the beast with certain capabilities after all. Perhaps those were based on this robot. However, there was one clear difference apart from the fact that the incoming lights were black instead of green.

They looked like miniature black holes as the air around them twisted and distorted beyond recognition, warning Zac of the terrifying power they contained as they rushed toward him in parabolic arcs. Zac desperately tried to dodge the ballistics, but they possessed the same type of homing capabilities as the battleroach king.

Zac felt there was no option except to once again hunkering down to withstand the assaults. The projectiles were approaching him from all directions by this point and he saw no other way to block them all. He rolled forward and placed both his shield and bulwark above him to endure the blasts. The large mecha immediately pointed its other arm toward him and shot a beam at him from an attached gun.

Luckily it wasn't the same weapon as the huge barrel that had fired at him while he was launched into the air. That barrel was over five times wider and was mounted instead of a real hand at the end of his arm. The weapon the mecha used now was instead the same type as the ones that the flying drones from earlier used.

Such a beam wouldn't be able to break through his turtle defense, so Zac didn't worry too much about it. But before he knew what was happening he was suddenly flailing about almost ten meters in the air as the black holes closed in on him. The beam hadn't been aimed at his shield to crack open his defense, it was rather shot in front of him.

The blast had launched him up in the air, circumventing his defense against the other attacks. Zac saw no option to infuse his whole body with the Seed of Hardness as he tried to cover as much of his body as possible with [Immutable Bulwark] and his shield. But he could only block some of the strikes and a burning pain erupted in his back as one of the black holes slammed into him, causing a deep wound dripping ichor. His Miasma was rapidly depleted as well from the tens of balls hitting his bulwark.

The large tower shield wasn't faring much better, as parts of it got bent and twisted when blocking the attack. The shield still hadn't completely recovered from the bout with the battleroach king, and this put it dangerously close to falling apart completely. Anger burned in Zac's chest from the pain of the multiple impacts, and he roared as he rushed the final stretch.

A huge metallic foot ripped through the air toward Zac as the mecha tried to kill him with a kick. But whatever was controlling the robot had underestimated Zac's strength as he met the kick head-on. The kick slammed into him and pushed him backward, but Zac pushed back with all the power in his body as he imbued himself with the Dao of Heaviness.

His fingers dug into the thick plating as he stopped the kick with his superhuman strength. However, Zac wasn't done there. His muscles strained as [Unholy Strike] was used to its limit, and Zac was actually starting to drag the huge machine. It tried to fight back, but Zac was relentless. His mind was telling Zac to fling the machine into the horizon, or slam it into the ground like an enraged caveman.

But, unfortunately, reality wouldn't comply with his rage, and he only managed to topple it. The thing was extremely heavy, and even with his Strength he wasn't able to toss it around like a ragdoll. But at least it was down on the ground, and Zac pounced on it like a rabid beast before it could get back on its feet.

All its limbs were equipped with various weapons, such as battle knives and ranged weaponry. But that arsenal was of no use against Zac who had managed to climb up on its chest with his axe ready to cause some real damage. But a flash of greed suddenly overcame his rage, and he peered down at the machine with interest.

He slammed his hand down on the mecha as he infused his Cosmos Sack with energy, but he growled in annoyance when nothing happened. He had wanted to both neutralize the threat and make some money by stealing the whole thing. But if he couldn't take it then it didn't need to continue existing. A storm of corrosion blew around him as Zac started to hammer down on the chest plate of the machine.

A blue shield managed to block the first round of attacks, but Zac wouldn't give up. Even when he started getting shot by some Technocrats down on the ground he wouldn't relent, and shockwave after shockwave exploded from the top of the robot until the shield broke and Verun's Bite bit into the robot. There was actually a cockpit inside, and a small green alien peered up at Zac with horror when he finally managed to rip apart the chest plate.

A beam flashed as Zac peered down into the cockpit, but he managed to dodge the blast from the pilot's rifle at the last moment with the help of his Luck. Zac growled in anger as he reached into the cockpit and grabbed the alien by the neck. A nasty crack echoed out from the robot as Zac got a huge stream of energy. It looked like killing the pilot also counted as killing the robot itself.

Zac was about to start demolishing the mecha in his towering rage, but he suddenly froze as he tried to put the robot in his Cosmos Sack again. This time it worked without issue, and he fell into the ground with a thump. He took a gander at the state of the battle, and he felt everything was mostly under control.

Most of the battle droids were destroyed by his and Ogras' efforts, and quite a few of the actual technocrats were dead or dying as well. The demon was currently whittling down the second robot, and he had managed to tear off one of its arms somehow. Ogras had activated his ultimate state, and he was currently in the skies circling the landbound mecha. His large wings kept him out of harm's way as he struck the robot over and over with lightning speed.

The foreman and his four bodyguards were still on the battlefield, but they still hadn't done anything. He already knew from questioning the Technocrat earlier that the four cultivators were there to serve as bodyguards for Syvas, the leader of the Incursion. Whether the rest of the Technocrats lived or died didn't matter in the slightest to them as they were just hired hands.

There was no way they would involve themselves in the battle unless they got paid extra or if Zac attacked Syvas himself. But it didn't look like the Technocrat boss had any interest in joining the battle. In fact, the group of 5 seemed to be inching toward the Nexus Hub behind them.

Zac had no intention of letting the leader go, and it looked like it was time to go all-out. But before he assaulted the five E-Grade warriors he needed to make sure his back was protected from the remnants of the Technocrat army.

"It's time buddy," Zac said as the huge form of Verun appeared with an earthshattering roar.