

The Fall 607

Chapter 607: Unmarked Boxes

"I wouldn't say the Tower of Eternity was all fun and games," Zac muttered as his eyes turned back to the box in front of him. "Do complex machines like mechas and drones grow in this place?"

"I am not sure, but I don't think so?" Kenzie said. "I have been keeping watch on my drones, and they are exactly the same as before. I think it's because they have an active energy source and a steady current, and the energy is dense enough to inhibit whatever the Dimensional Seed is doing to this place."

"So the Core Sector might actually be normal-sized?" Thea ventured. "I imagine that the Core if any place would have a lot of this Base Power running through the walls."

"Perhaps," Kenzie said. "But it's also possible that the spatial energies of the Dimensional Seed would just overpower everything around it in such close proximity. I guess we'll find out as we get closer."

"So, can we open these things?" Ogras asked with gleaming eyes. "Or is there a reason the beastmen left them behind?"

"I- Don't think there's a problem?" Kenzie said, but she didn't seem sure as she looked down at her tablet. "I can't see anything out of the norm. It's just a storage box with some environmental maintenance protocols. Is it really worth looting this place now though? We have time, but..."

"Treasures are meant to be taken, girl. Your brother is a walking opportunity-magnet, we need to make use of it. Knowing his luck these boxes might contain exactly what we need to deal with the insect bastards," Ogras said as he turned to Zac. "Go ahead. Conjure something useful."

"I'm not some magician," Zac snorted, but he was tempted.

It felt like a waste to leave these boxes behind. Who knew what would happen in the future? The whole base might start falling apart after the Dimensional Seed was taken away considering how integrated it seemed to be with the base. Anything left behind might be lost forever. Zac had over ten empty top-quality Cosmos Sacks on him, meant to be stuffed with everything from raw materials to spaceships, and now was as good a time as any to start looting.

So Zac jumped up to press the only button on the box, a small smile spreading across his face.

"Wait stop!" Kenzie shouted with urgency, prompting Zac to immediately push away from the box without opening it, and he landed right behind the group.

"What? What's going on?" Zac asked.

"There's something weird going on. Everything is fine according to the readings, but I sensed some sort of energies in the air. I think-" she muttered, but she didn't get any further as a series of previously hidden vents suddenly appeared on the closest boxes.

A dense cloud of some unknown gas blasted out the next moment, forcing the group to scramble out of the way. They quickly realized that it was just normal steam released to depressurize the containers, but the fact they suddenly woke up without Zac touching them clearly wasn't good news.

“Some luck. Forgot you're a trouble magnet as well,” Ogras muttered as shadows swallowed their group, and they reappeared half across the vast storeroom a second later.

Zac could only roll his eyes in response as they rushed for the only door in the warehouse, an exit on the opposite side where they came from. A barrier had already appeared to block their escape and Zac frowned when he saw how thick it was. It looked like a beefed-up version of the ones they had encountered before, or perhaps it was simply being fed a lot more Base Power compared to the shields in the Outer Ring.

Worse yet, more and more boxes were releasing steam, and the whole room echoed with clanking sounds as they opened by the hundreds.

The ground cracked beneath Zac's feet as he shot toward the red barrier while a halo appeared behind his back. Inside it was the avatar of the axe-man's axe, and it caused Zac's aura to grow deeper as he slammed [Verun's Bite] into the shield.

Popping sounds echoed out across the area as the air exploded from the force generated by [Conformation of Supremacy]. A series of crashes quickly followed as both Ogras and Thea appeared to his left and right, each of them releasing an all-out strike at the barrier. But the shield was beyond sturdy. It didn't even shudder even though the air itself had been ripped apart, forming a series of chaotic spatial tears that were quickly swallowed by the barrier itself.

“Watch out!” Kenzie screamed, but Zac was already moving by that point as his Danger Sense had warned him of an impending attack.

Two bronze blades stabbed into the ground where he just stood a moment ago, both of them attached to thin mechanical arms that stretched over fifty meters into the haze. Zac looked toward the source, spotting a spherical object that was slowly emerging from the steam. It was about three meters across, making the massive container it came out of look almost comically oversized.

Zac's first guess was that Kenzie was right. The boxes had grown while the contents had not. That by itself felt like a huge lucky break as the force contained in that stab just now had been a bit troubling, powerful enough to leave marks on the sturdy Memorysteel floor. But Kenzie's theory was quickly proven imperfect at best as more spherical objects came rolling out of the nearby crates, each of them of a different size.

The smallest ones were just about Zac's height, with the largest ones being tower monstrosities reaching almost fifteen meters in the air. The steam quickly dissipated as well, giving the group a better look at what they were dealing with. Zac wasn't surprised to see that they were all some sort of landbound drones that looked like enormous brass balls.

The bladed weapons from before were actually a part of the ball's surface, like hidden mantis scythes that were normally protected inside the ball itself. A dozen smaller such appendages suddenly split out from the bottom of the ball as well, creating a series of nimble appendages that allowed the closest machines to rush toward them.

“Can you control it? Or them?” Zac said as he looked across the warehouse with trepidation.

Did all these containers contain a killing machine like this?

The question quickly became apparent as more and more machines scurried out, quickly forming an army inside the warehouse. Thankfully it looked like less than a third of the boxes actually conjured a spider ball. The rest still housed similar machines, but they failed to activate for some reason or another.

There were also quite a few machines that seemed to move about like they were drunk, perhaps lacking some integral parts due to lack of service over the past millennia. Zac quickly realized what was going on. The smaller machines seemed to work flawlessly as they arranged themselves before moving toward his group. The mid-sized ones had various problems affecting their mobility, and the largest balls didn't even seem able to activate.

The Spatial Expansion had worked on these machines, but to varying degrees. The more they had expanded the worse condition they were left in. That wasn't surprising considering they no doubt contained extremely precise technology, like all kinds of chipsets that might have broken down from being forcibly expanded by the Dao of Space.

Still, the functional ones were more than enough to make Zac feel some pressure, and he was quickly beset by a flurry of scythes coming at him from every direction. Each swing contained a fierce momentum, and the blades themselves were barely damaged after Zac blocked them with [Chop]. Whatever alloy they were made of was even sturdier than the Memorysteel in the walls.

The one saving grace was that some of the machines were so massive that they blocked out their smaller brethren, making it so they only needed to face a few dozen at a time. Still, Zac knew it would take a huge effort to take them all out, so he looked over at his sister who frantically was typing away at her tablet.

"Nothing I do works!" she said with panic in her eyes. "I- I- can't..."

"Stay calm," Zac said as his arms turned into a blur while keeping the continuous waves of attacks at bay. "If you can't control the robots, work on the shield instead."

"Right!" Kenzie exclaimed as she quickly found her bearing, and she hurried to the wall and directly connected it to her tablet with a cable.

Ogras immediately threw out a series of array disks before he covered her in shadows, but it didn't seem to work as five of the robots immediately targeted Kenzie's position. Their attacks only made it half-way before a blue streak rippled through the air though, and the mantis-like blades fell to the ground cleanly cut off. It was Thea who had targeted the thin arms of the robots rather than the blades themselves, and Zac noticed that scars appeared out of nowhere on a lot of the battlebots.

It was likely Thea's invisible Spirit Tool, which Zac thought she had discarded in favor of the graceful blue sword in her hands. But it looked like Thea had rather added another weapon to her repertoire, with one focusing on large-scale battle and the other one on direct confrontation.

Ogras wasn't to be outdone either, and he melded with the shadows on the ground before he appeared in the middle among the machines, causing chaos among their ranks. It was hard to tell what was real and what was shadows as he flitted around, but every time his new spear struck a battlebot was destroyed. He was using the machines' weaknesses against them; the openings created in their outer shell every time they extended their weapons.

Zac wanted to join in as well, but he found himself in a passive state where he was forced to stay close to Kenzie, blocking an endless series of attacks. It even felt like the machines understood what Kenzie was trying to do, and more and more of the battlebots seemed to be targeting his sister. This wasn't like when they assaulted the Undead Incursion either; there were no Valkyries to erect a defensive War Array around his sister, and Ogras' array disks were just illusion arrays to hide her.

Part of him wanted to just drop a mountain on these machines, but he was afraid that the commotion would just cause even more trouble. The further they went into the base, the higher the risk was that they would attract attention from the Administrator. Besides, using [Nature's Punishment] might actually cause the whole roof to blow off again, providing the Collector with another point of ingress.

"What should we do?" Ogras shouted as he dragged out his spear from a 4-meter battlebot.

The machine tried to swing down one of its massive blades on the demon, but it suddenly shuddered before a storm of shadows emerged from every small crack in its plating. Everything inside was no doubt ripped apart from the demon's shadows.

"Keep destroying these things, but no attacks that might harm the base itself," Zac said as his eyes turned pitch-black. "I'll keep Kenzie safe as she works on the barrier."

A huge Miasmic Bulwark emerged the next second, effortlessly blocking the barrage of strikes coming Kenzie's way. Zac positioned himself right between the machines, readying himself for a protracted defense. His body grew as he activated [Vanguard of Undeath]. He didn't believe that the skill's taunting effect would work on the machines, but his increased size gave him a better reach.

"How does it look?" Zac asked as he cut off a scythe that tried to pass around his bulwark to strike Kenzie.

"It's working, but I need a few minutes," Kenzy said she frantically tapped away at her tablet.

Zac only grunted in response as he kept blocking. The defensive capabilities of his undead class were far beyond what he could manage in his human form, but his Draugr class wasn't all that effective in dealing with machines. [Deathwish] didn't seem able to copy the battlebots, perhaps because of the lack of spirituality. Furthermore, both [Fields of Despair] and [Winds of Decay] would probably harm his own people more than they would the robots.

Thea and Ogras were thankfully doing the work of half an army by themselves. It looked like the two were competing with each other for kills, with the Marshall Scion desperately trying to keep up with Ogras' large-scale destruction. Unfortunately for her, Ogras had already evolved and he had gained almost ten levels since doing so. That was the equivalent of over 80 F-Grade levels in terms of attributes, and Thea simply couldn't compete with that, try as she might.

Still, she showed amazing expertise as she moved back and forth between the machines. The smaller spider balls were extremely nimble and they could send out up to five scythes at a time. They created whole spheres of death around them, with bronze streaks filling the air. If these machines were dropped into his army they would have singlehandedly caused mass casualties before they were brought down.

But Thea somehow managed to walk right into those zones of death, quickly delivering a single strike with pinpoint precision, destroying the machine in one go. Zac himself had only turned into a glorified

guardian, or more like a mobile fortress as he expanded [Immutable Bulwark] to its maximum proportions.

He was also being assisted by the small mountain of broken machines that created a half-circle around them, making it harder and harder for the larger machines to get close. The big ones barely worked, but their scythes were simply humongous and they carried a tremendous force that managed to stab some ways into Zac's shield before he managed to shrug them off.

Zac wasn't really comfortable just staying on the passive, but he really had nothing to counter with at a time like this. It was one limitation of [Love's Bond]; it was unable to send out any chains while it was in its defensive form. That made it impossible for Zac to start destroying the battlebots with [Blighted Cut], even though he was pretty certain he would be able to puncture even these sturdy things with the help of the extremely potent corrosion.

"It's done!" Kenzie finally shouted, and the shield blocking the exit disappeared a second later. "Hurry, it will activate soon again!"

Zac quickly shrunk his bulwark just enough for Thea and Ogras to slip past him, and he brought up the rear as the others fled through the door. Zac was about to deactivate his fractal shield and exit as well, but he changed his mind at the last second as his Danger Sense had suddenly woken up again. A huge explosion rocked whole the area the next moment, causing massive cracks in Zac's fractal bulwark before the force threw him out of the gate.

Ogras was last to exit before Zac, and the demon yelped in surprised as he barely managed to avoid Zac's hulking form as he hurtled through the air. Zac slammed into the wall with enough force to cause a dent in the memory steel, but he just groaned as he got back on his feet, ready for another attack.

However, he was relieved to see that the gate had closed again.

"I just blocked the barrier for a few seconds, it's active again. Those robots shouldn't be able to get out," Kenzie said. "That last blast was the closest ones self-destructing."

"Okay, that might have been my bad. No more messing with unmarked boxes," Ogras muttered with a wry smile.