

## The Fall 401

### Chapter 401: Taboo Origins

Kenzie exhaled with a tired sigh as she waited for the drones to return to her side. Jeeves was doing all of the calculations when she commanded the flying machines to strike her targets, but the AI ran on her spirit energy to function. Destroying one infusion pillar felt even more draining than using all her Daos to battle for half an hour, even though she didn't even leave the flying treasure.

Ilvere silently gazed upon the destruction, not even bothering to comment as he directed the treasure toward their next target. He had assisted her for her campaign the past two days, taking care of all minor details so that she would only have to worry about the pillars themselves. No one else had accompanied the two out of security concerns.

Kenzie had felt a bit stupid after realizing that bringing the demon general might have opened a can of worms, but the general solved the issue by immediately creating a contract of silence after she destroyed the first pillar. It stipulated that he would keep silent on all matters regarding MacKenzie Atwood, and there was no time limitation. As for remuneration, it was only 1 Nexus Crystal a year.

Ilvere was a trusted general under her brother and Ogras, and she had initially felt it was unnecessary to go to such lengths regarding such a small issue. But the demon had said it was as much for himself as for her as he didn't want his head to leave his shoulders when Lord Atwood returned in two days.

She initially wanted to refute him, but she honestly wasn't sure what the truth was any longer. Her brother had changed during the past months, and she wasn't just talking about the transformation that everyone was forced to undergo to survive in this new environment. He had become harsher, more paranoid. It honestly wasn't impossible that he'd kill Ilvere just to make sure nothing would leak out about their heritage.

Of course, the demon general only knew a part of the truth. She had explained the drones by saying that Zac had found the Technocrat Incursion while in the Underworld, and he had decided to take their technology for himself to protect Earth. It was taboo technology, but things were getting desperate and her brother had made the decision to bear any repercussions by the System for using them.

Luckily for her Earth was somewhat technologically advanced before the integration, and it was impossible for a demon like Ilvere to properly understand the vast gap between the tablets and cars of old Earth and the futuristic drones crammed full of shocking technology. He thought that Zac had put some of their engineers on analyzing the drones before they quickly were deployed into battle, which was of course ludicrous. It would probably take years to reverse-engineer this type of technology, if they ever managed to do it.

As for repercussions, Jeeves assured her there would be none. It was something that her AI was still vague about, but it had on multiple occasions assured her that he would not draw any ire from the System for its existence or actions. She wasn't sure what to believe about that claim though. Her AI was a great teacher, but how could it control what the System would do?

Since Ilvere was in charge of driving the flying treasure toward the next pillar she closed her eyes and focused on one of her training regimens. She formed four thin strands of Dao Energy in her mind and

started to arduously weave them together into an ugly braid. It required extreme control of her Dao Energy and it didn't have a lot of applications, but it did help her in various ways.

Braiding her Daos allowed her to take the first step toward fusing them in the future while also helping her to more naturally use multiple Daos while battling. She could only infuse two of her elements into an attack at the moment, but Jeeves assured her a full infusion of all four was possible.

'Can't you help Zac a bit and create a training program for him as well?' Kenzie entreated for the umpteenth time. 'You know he's struggling with this type of stuff.'

[No. I cannot get involved with him.] the synthetic voice answered as usual. [I cannot.]

'But why?' Kenzie lambasted in her mind, her usual caution thrown to the wind due to stress and exhaustion. 'You know he is the best shot for us all surviving. If he fails against the undead we'll all die. Unless you tell me I won't feed you any longer!'

[...]

[Pain. Fear. Loss]

Kenzie's vision suddenly changed to an enormous chamber. Her eyes were instinctively drawn to a large insignia depicting nine horizontal lines of increasingly short length forming a downward-pointing triangle. One vertical line cut straight through the nine lines, splitting the triangle in two, and the ends of the line were sticking out a bit on each side.

There was not much else to see in the chamber. The walls and floor were a pristine white, and the lack of details made it impossible to guess whether they were ten meters or hundreds of meters away.

The only other exception to the endless white was the machine.

The machine was beyond anything she had seen before, no matter if she talked size or complexity. It was built in concentric circles where it formed an upside-down pyramid with its tip pointing toward her vantage point.

Even the small tip that stopped fifty meters or so above her head was over a hundred meters wide, which made it almost incomprehensible just how large the machine was at the far thicker base at the top. The chamber itself must be tens, perhaps hundreds of kilometers in diameter judging by the machine. The construction dwarfed anything she had ever encountered.

Even the Mystic Realm she had spent a lot of time inside recently shouldn't be as big as this single room judging by the size of the apparatus.

The tip of the machine was neither flat nor sharp. It rather ended in thousands of spikes aligned toward her. Each one thrummed with enough power to tear a hole in the fabric of space, and her vision swam from focusing on any single one of them.

Each of the spikes felt like a doomsday device, each one of them containing their own unique way to destroy the world. Four of them actually resonated with Kenzie's soul, making her realize the spikes contained the Daos of Tinder, Loam, Waves, and Gust. But if her Dao Seeds were snippets of a fragment of a grand truth, then these spikes contained the real deal.

Was Jeeves trying to appease her by giving her a hint into her Daos?

A flashing light interrupted Kenzie's inspection and the scene changed to one of utter destruction. The machine was mostly gone, and fragments from the construction scorched almost beyond recognition floated in an empty space illuminated in blue.

Two massive vaulted domes with enormous cracks floated in the distance, each surrounded by a nebula of technological debris. She tried to look closer, but she soon lost sight of the domes as her vision slowly turned away. She realized she was in space as well, slowly rotating from her own momentum.

But the odd sights didn't end, and something even more shocking waited for her as she spun 180 degrees. Endless oceans of lightning covered the darkness of space, creating a spectacle of an impossible scale.

The lightning was too scary and Kenzie felt it contained the power to destroy everything in the world. And its scope was massive. She spotted a whole planet being swallowed inside the lightning like a small pebble in a pond, which meant the lightning at least covered an area as large as a whole solar system.

Kenzie couldn't make sense of what happened, and then the scene was over.

'What was that?!' Kenzie asked with shock, barely coherent enough to not speak out aloud.

The magnitude of what she had witnessed was far beyond anything she had encountered so far. It made her remember the Dao Visions that her brother had recounted for her. Such a thing like the machine or the sea of lightning wasn't something someone from their little planet should come into contact with.

The power in that lightning was terrifying. She had no doubt that if just one wisp of lightning from that ocean grazed Earth only a scorched husk would remain. There was something primordial about it, like it contained the wrath of the universe itself.

Your origin? Kenzie ventured when Jeeves didn't directly answer.

[Probably.]

But what does that have to do with my brother or why you won't help him?

[I don't know.]

After that exchange the AI turned taciturn and refused to answer any further questions. But Kenzie was still happy about the result. She had glimpsed what was probably the origin of Jeeves, which was also a clue to finding mom.

That large insignia was the first clue, and she made sure to memorize it properly. The second clue was that terrifying lake of lightning. Was that the System itself descending on the Technocrats? She knew the two forces were at odds, but she hadn't heard of the System actively going against them. It seemed to usually work circuitously by giving quests or restricting the Technocrats in various ways.

Kenzie opened her eyes and resumed looking at the passing landscape since Jeeves wasn't in the mood to talk any longer. These past two days they had been in constant motion, closing one pillar after another with the help of the drone swarms.

However, the next target was likely their last one. The drones were all spent, and they would require at least a week to convert Cosmic Energy to whatever energy they used to fly about. It was an extremely convenient technology to never require any upkeep, but she wished they just had some batteries they could swap out at this juncture.

It took them two more hours before they reached the pillar by flying at maximum speed. The pillar was the same as all others, an azure beacon of energy left alone in a desolate area. No zombies or other guards were stationed around it, giving them free rein to do what they wanted. It was a bit odd, but it felt like the undead truly didn't care if some pillars were destroyed.

It was due to the redundancies according to Jeeves. Since the undead managed to activate the array a pathway had formed in the sky. That pathway was self-sustaining and slowly filled with miasma by the beacons, and destroying a pillar would only hamper the rate the pathway was filled. It wouldn't stop the array itself. You'd need to destroy the Array Core to do that, and that thing was no doubt in the heart of the Dead Zone.

How such a thing was made was beyond Kenzie even after her intense study of arrays. It was likely a higher-tiered Array compared to the basic ones she had learned thus far. An array surviving even after its flags getting destroyed was no doubt the result of some high-grade technique that might have been unknown to the small Sect where Zac got the information crystals.

Kenzie ordered the swarm of drones to emerge once more and form a circle around the beacon. A high-intensity blast followed, and the next moment the pillar was exchanged with a smoldering crater. Kenzie nodded in satisfaction and recalled her spent drones, but a dozen of them were suddenly destroyed as a female voice drifted across the area.

"So your ilk is still skulking around on this planet after all. Makes sense you wouldn't want to give up that base. But you made a mistake when deciding to meddle with the Empire's affairs. You should know that the conquest won't be stopped for any reason."

The next moment terrifying energies were released from the ground as another miasmatic beacon shot into the sky. In the middle of it a blurry figure floated in the air, teeming with power.

"She's too strong," Ilvere said with a frown as he infused the flying disk with a lot of Cosmic Energy. "I'll try to block her attacks as we flee. Let the young master and Lord Atwood deal with her when they return."

"Left!" Kenzie suddenly screamed, prompted by Jeeves who had awoken again.

But it was too late.

Ilvere unhesitantly followed her advice, but his reaction wasn't quick enough. A lance formed of what looked like crude oil slammed straight into the disk from below, cracking the whole flying treasure in two. Horror filled Kenzie's heart as they were over a hundred meters into the air.

"Down you go," the undead woman's laugh echoed across the area.

'Help' Kenzie shrieked in her mind, knowing that she was out of her league.