

## The Fall 663

### Chapter 663: Tribulation

"I can't believe that guy is this greedy," Zac sighed. "Your purchases would have bankrupted a normal D-Grade force."

"There is an endless number of Daos. It's pretty good that Jeeves only wanted the taste of three hundred," Kenzie laughed as she stood up. "Let's go. I've been waiting for this for so long now."

"If you say so," Zac shrugged as he followed her toward the teleportation array.

It felt like too big a risk to evolve Jeeves right in Port Atwood, so they had instead prepared a special island over the past months. It had a Nexus Node of its own, along with a series of machines that would help with the evolution.

"I still don't get why it wants that many different attunements," Zac muttered as they teleported away. "Why not focus on the four elements like you do?"

It was true, most of the requirements for Jeeves' evolution hadn't been machines or technology. It was rather raw materials of different attunements. It was essentially gaining insight into hundreds of Daos by absorbing treasures that held a hint of the Dao itself. It was no doubt modeled after the methods used in the Research Base, where thousands of Daos fused into a supreme containment sphere.

It had been pretty easy to satisfy that demand in the beginning with the help of Zac's huge stockpile of Attuned Crystals, but it started to get increasingly difficult over time.

First of all, it wasn't enough to feed the greedy AI with crystals alone. It required various sources of every Dao to gain a deep enough understanding. The amount of attunement hidden in an Attuned Crystal was ultimately pretty weak and shallow compared to natural treasures. Even then, some attunements were pretty popular and easy to gain, but others were a lot more difficult.

For example, it took almost no effort to collect a few sets of treasures for nature-aspected Daos. These were actively grown since they were a major component in healing pills.

The same went for fire-attuned materials. They could easily be collected around volcanoes. But after they had collected some cheaper materials for the basic elemental Daos things got more difficult. For example, where could you find raw materials containing weapon-based Daos? The same went for Daos based on concepts, such as Ilvere's Dao of Momentum or Alyn's Dao of Dissemination.

These kinds of weird Natural Treasures actually did exist, but they were unsurprisingly pretty rare. They were still useful in crafting equipment of specific attunements though, and with their scarcity, it did drive up the price. That was one of the reasons why the upgrade costs had ballooned to this degree over the past three years.

Zac shuddered at the costs that would go into evolving the AI in the future. If it required materials for a full three hundred Daos now, what would it demand the next time? And would the materials all have to be D-Grade? Earth and Port Atwood couldn't even support this initial evolution, let alone future ones.

All that was thankfully a problem for a distant issue. Zac would hopefully have gotten his hands on enough riches over the next century, and Kenzie's money-making capabilities would only improve as her cultivation increased.

"I told you. Jeeves needs the different Daos to gain a true understanding of cultivation. The more Daos he collects, the better he can assist me. Everything is connected," Kenzie explained. "That's why I spent so much time looking for these final items."

"Alright. Did the guy also happen to know what will happen when he evolves? I mean this seems like something that will attract Tribulation Lighting even if he supposedly can hide from the System," Zac said.

"It should be fine. Besides, we won't harm anyone this far away from civilization even if something happens," Kenzie said as she looked around. "Besides, Jeeves is extremely strong for his grade. He could even knock out the Administrator, breaking through will be a breeze."

"It's you I'm worried about," Zac sighed. "If the Heavens zap your AI, it's not like you'll walk away unscathed."

"It shouldn't be," Kenzie said. "Jeeves hasn't elicited any ire from the System"

"I'm not so sure about that," Zac muttered, remembering the quest back then.

"You can't get too paranoid," Kenzie shrugged with a long-suffering look, which wasn't surprising considering the two already had this argument many times before. "Taking the Dimensional Seed would probably have been a great boon for you. It would definitely be a worthwhile trade in the eyes of the System. Trading the life of one person who focuses on the Dao of Technology for a power-up of a million-year-talent? Easy trade. It doesn't mean it has targeted Jeeves."

"Alright, alright. You're sure there's nothing I can do?" Zac asked.

"Nope," Kenzie said. "I'll feed Jeeves the last materials and evolve as he does."

Zac could only look on with worry as she walked over to the middle of the rotunda where the Nexus Node hovered in the air. Nine intricately inscribed boxes appeared around her, and Zac's body immediately started to scream with greed the moment she opened them.

He didn't know what all the items Kenzie collected were, but he knew about two of them. One was called a [Lavoar Wavespirit], and it looked like a crystallized drop of deep-blue water. It was an amazing water-attuned treasure that could actually increase one's affinity with the various Daos of Water.

It wasn't as magical as a treasure that could turn a mortal into a cultivator, but what cultivator didn't dream of increasing their affinities to their Daos?

It was a peak treasure for the lower grades in the Zecia sector, far surpassing things like the Fruit of Ascension or his Amanita Mushroom. Its price reflected that fact as well, and he knew that Kenzie had an off-world agent pay over 200 Billion Nexus Coins for this item alone. It was way beyond even the [Pathfinder Oracle Eye]. Of course, the price of that kind of treasure could probably reach 200 Billion as well outside the Base Town, provided there were a few interested parties.

The second treasure he recognized was the [Avar Worldtree Nut], a nut no larger than an acorn. It was one of the treasures that were the cause for the ruckus in his cells because of the dense life it contained. The Avar Worldtree was a semi-sentient tree that had a chance to reach the power equivalent of peak D-Grade Cultivator if it was tended for properly.

It could turn into a guardian for a clan, where its vines could stretch tens of kilometers and rip apart an invading army. It would even grow large enough that one could build a whole city in its tree crowns. Of course, growing it to such a state would cost a fortune and it would take over ten thousand years, but it was still a very popular choice for some races to set up a foundation for a rising clan.

The Avar Worldtrees weren't that rare thanks to its popularity. But they still only grew a nut or two every few millennia, so the supply was pretty limited. One nut cost over 30 Billion Nexus Coins.

The other treasures each had an element of their own, and the five basic elements were represented; Water, Wood, Fire, Earth, and Metal. There were also two treasures pertaining to Life and Death, and two for Time and Space.

These treasures were all the best of the best among what was publicly available in the Zecia Sector, and a few of them could even match the Wavespirit in price. Thankfully, the rest of the items Kenzie had gathered until this point were a lot cheaper than these nine. She had splurged extra as these were foundational Daos and the Daos for her path, and she wanted Jeeves to understand them as deeply as possible.

Zac watched with rapt attention as his sister took out one item after another and pressed it against her forehead, which caused them to disappear in a flash. It was Jeeves that was somehow absorbing the natural treasures. Three hundred Memorysteel balls, each one meter across and covered in dense scripts, rose into the air the next moment.

It looked like they formed a constellation of planets above the rotunda, and Zac felt various Daos emanating from each of them. This was an invention of his sister, based on the containment sphere in the Research Base. However, these balls each held Natural Treasures of their own, and they suffused their energies into the surroundings.

They also moved in a certain pattern that Zac couldn't understand at all, but it definitely held some hidden meaning since Zac's soul shuddered from trying to observe it. The movements also mixed the three hundred Daos, with Kenzie in the center. Zac gazed at the extravagant display, knowing that Kenzie was currently burning Millions of Nexus Coins every second.

Nothing happened for the first thirty minutes, but Kenzie's brows slowly furrowed either in pain or concentration. Zac could only look on with worry, knowing he couldn't do anything to help at this point. This was uncharted territory, evolving a mysterious AI to the next stage. Jeeves itself said that it should be effortless, but Zac wouldn't trust the parasitic AI as far as he could throw it.

The frown soon turned into a scowl, and Kenzie soon groaned in pain through grit teeth. Her aura was starting to fluctuate wildly, and Zac started to get a sinking feeling. This wasn't looking good.

A piercing scream of danger made Zac wildly look around, a raging fury bubbling up in his chest. Was someone actually targeting them while Kenzie was undergoing her tribulation? He'd slaughter anyone

who caused a scene at this point. However, Zac quickly realized that the danger didn't come from a rival faction or an assassin, but from the Heavens themselves.

The sky was clear just a few seconds ago, but a sea of blue lightning bolts approached on the horizon. One second later they had arrived, and Zac looked up with horror as one tendril after another started to descend. There was no way to defend against this. Kenzie had installed lightning rods on the island upon his insistence, but there was no way they'd be able to handle something like this. Zac doubted even the island itself would survive an onslaught of this magnitude.

And even if the lightning somehow dissipated, there was still the issue of Kenzie herself. She clearly looked in a bad way, and she hadn't even touched the Nexus Node yet. It had to be Jeeves' evolution that was somehow taxing her to the point that she wasn't even aware of the danger that was creeping up on her. Zac's hair stood on end, and he knew this attempt would end in failure.

He needed to do something to save Kenzie, and he decided to enact his last-ditch plan. He couldn't help with Jeeves, but perhaps they could escape the Heavenly Lightning if he sent her away from Earth. He would first take Kenzie away from this island through the teleportation Array and then send her away with a Teleportation Token. Or he could at least swallow some of the lightning to lessen her burden.

However, a sigh echoed through the world just as Zac was about to rush in between the still-floating Memorysteel balls, and it felt like time ground to a halt.

The horizon was fractured the next second as a mindbogglingly large scar appeared, a vertical line splitting Zac's vision in two. It almost touched the ground on one end while it stretched all the way into the stratosphere on the other. Four sets of enormous hands reached through the cracks, pushing them apart further and further, giving Zac a glimpse of the other side.

Waiting on the other side of the crack was either deep space or the abyss itself, but Zac could barely discern what looked like a purple sun. However, Zac felt a terrifying force radiating from the star, making him believe it was something far greater than some burning ball of hydrogen.

The fingers themselves looked like perfectly sculpted works of art, steel appendages where the divide between real and artificial had been blurred. However, the hands were not just made from solid matter. There was also a purple haze filled with mysterious energies that replaced the joints, which added a supernatural feeling to the incoming leviathan.

The haze reminded Zac of the blue stream of pure energies that powered the Little Bean, but the Technocrat Vessel's huge energy circuits felt like weak alkaline batteries in front of the power contained in a single finger of the mysterious being making its entrance.

Eight arms were soon followed by a face, and space itself shuddered as the metal giant emerged. The being had a clearly female form, and a dress made of purple stardust swirled around her body. She was as tall as a mountain, and a single finger of hers would be able to push the whole island he stood on into the depths of the ocean. The whole sea was actually pushed away from her presence, allowing her to step on solid ground a few kilometers out from land.

The crack soon closed behind her, but space itself was clearly having trouble containing this monstrosity. Spatial tears stretched across the horizon, and it was like the laws of nature were breaking apart in her presence as she started walking toward the shore beneath a sky of frozen lightning.

Nine halos wrought from the Dao itself swirled behind her back, each one containing even more power than the one before. Even the blue lightning bolts were overshadowed by their splendor.

They formed a mysterious pattern that was ever-changing, and Zac was instantly put in a trance as he looked at them. They contained the profundity of the universe, and at a level that far exceeded what he could comprehend. The feeling far exceeded even what he had felt inside the chambers that had sealed the Dimensional Seed.

The scene was shocking, and a primal part of Zac's subconscious simply wanted him to fall on his knees in obeisance to the incoming entity. There was no escape from something like this. You could only pray that a being like this wouldn't deign to waste their breath to kill you.

However, while Zac's heart beat like a drum, it wasn't simply out of abject fear. His emotions were a lot more complicated as he looked up at the foreign yet familiar face a thousand meters in the air. The auburn locks were replaced by purple strings of aether, but the fundamental features were still there. The face of someone who had hugged him goodnight, who had walked him to school as a child.

Leandra Atwood had finally returned to Earth.