

The Fall 664

Chapter 664: Destiny

The world was frozen from Leandra Atwood's descent, but the Heavens wouldn't be denied for long. The Tribulation Lightning churned and raged, like her very existence was an affront to the Heavens. Before it was just some of the tendrils moving toward the island, whereas thousands of blue bolts fell from the sky now. But how could Leandra not have come unprepared?

She opened one of her hands, and thousands upon thousands of mysterious lights were conjured out of nowhere, each of them forming a barrier that far eclipsed anything Zac and Kenzie would ever manage to buy or create. The uproar in the sky only increased in intensity, and attacks rained upon the barrier. It looked like the whole world would collapse, and Zac's felt an overwhelming pressure by standing right beneath the terrifying display.

Deep cracks and purple discoloration spread across the barriers, but they actually held even against the System's Tribulation Lightning. A few of her hands formed a set of seals that seemed to adjust the barriers to strengthen them even further. Leandra then inspected the scene for a moment before her gaze shifted to Zac and Kenzie down on the ground.

One of her free hands formed a different seal, and Zac's suddenly found himself utterly incapable of movement. More worryingly, Kenzie seemed to have been knocked unconscious as she floated a few meters into the air while the Memorysteel-balls floated out of the way.

"Wait!" Zac shouted as he tried to put himself between Kenzie and Leandra, but it was simply futile to break through the restraints.

He could only look on with worry as one mysterious layer after another encapsulated his sister until she wasn't even visible within the cocoon of pure energy. Zac still had no idea whether Leandra was a friend or a foe, but one thing was for certain; she was at least able to help them survive this calamity.

At least Zac hoped she was, since it looked like the intensity of the lightning in the sky only grew increasingly severe.

Leandra looked up at the sky again for a few seconds, and Zac shuddered when he was inundated by a deep-seated hatred that made his hair stand on end. It was so far beyond any killing intent Zac would ever be able to unleash that it might as well be considered something completely different. The burning anger of someone as powerful as Leandra seemed to impact reality itself, and even the sun dimmed as the ocean started to boil. He was lucky her gaze was directed at the sky rather than himself, since he wasn't sure he'd survive the attention.

Zac still felt his vision closing in on him as cracks appeared all over his organs. Thankfully the feeling soon disappeared, but Zac knew they weren't out of the woods just yet as the sky was still rumbling with increasing fervor. For some reason, Zac sensed it had lost some of its direction though, like it couldn't find Kenzie hidden in that cocoon of his mother's. Was that the purpose of those barriers, rather than actual protection?

It still seemed like there was a distinct possibility that the System would decide to simply smite the whole island if it couldn't find Kenzie, but Leandra finally was preparing her next move. The giant's eight

hands slowly formed a circle, and a blinding light appeared inside like she was forming some sort of portal with her own body. Zac looked on with apprehension, and his eyes widened when a familiar figure walked out from the light.

It was flesh and blood Leandra, looking exactly as he remembered.

The metal giant wasn't actually his mother? Then again, Zac quickly realized that things might not be completely clear-cut for Technocrats as the lofty giant behind her back quickly disintegrated into purple dust. Some of it entered Leandra's body as she floated down toward their location, while parts formed a dome across the rotunda Kenzie had prepared for her evolution.

Zac didn't immediately understand what the dome did, but he soon understood when realizing that the lightning above suddenly moved at a fraction of its original speed. She had set up a time dilation sphere.

"Mom... You're back," Zac said with hesitance, his mind trying to gauge whether the Leandra in front of him was the one from his vision or the far more amiable version recorded in the Technocrat Token.

Leandra's eyes slowly shifted away from the cocoon to briefly pause at a spot in the ocean before she looked into Zac's eyes. There wasn't the scathing hatred that Zac had felt in his vision, but neither was this the gaze of a loving mother. It was tranquil, to the point of being void of emotion entirely.

"You've done well, protecting your sister during the Corruption," she said with a nod. "In fact, your progress has greatly surprised me."

Zac didn't immediately understand what she was talking about, and even wondered if she was talking about his Bloodline. But he soon realized that Corruption might be referring to the Integration. After all, the System spreading across the multiverse was probably seen as corruption by the Technocrats.

"What are you doing with Kenzie?" Zac asked full of trepidation.

"You were too eager, trying to evolve Digital Nexus prematurely. You and the Nexus might have survived Heaven's Judgement once, but that does not mean you're able to walk unabashed under the sun," Leandra said. "I am sealing your sister's progress for now, until I can properly nurture the Nexus. It is too early for MacKenzie as well. She doesn't have your constitution, she will not be able to bear the burden as she currently is. She should have realized that already, but she still pushed on."

"What? Evolving Jeeves would kill her?" said with shock.

"Jeeves?" Leandra repeated with confusion before she understood what she was talking about. "Yes. Half her blood is that of Robert Atwood, a normal mortal. That she was even able to receive and fuse with the Digital Nexus is nothing short of a miracle. But to reach our goal... Will be difficult. We need to leave this sector if we want a chance at success."

Zac's thoughts spun as he went over the information. It seemed even more and more likely that he and Jeeves were originally meant to be used together. And as expected, Leandra had come to take Kenzie away. Zac was full of reluctance, but he had to admit it was better than getting incinerated by tribulation lightning.

"Dad... Died during the Incursion," Zac said, somewhat of a loss of what else to say.

There was no familial warmth as the two stood facing each other, and he almost felt like a soldier making a report to his general.

"I know," Leandra nodded, and Zac inwardly frowned when there was not the slightest change in her expression. "Robert was a good man who helped us in our time of need. He deserved a better ending. Too many have fallen to the machinations of the Villanous Heavens. One day there will be a reckoning."

Leandra appeared completely indifferent to everything, which made Zac's early childhood memories feel like an illusion. It pained him in a way he hadn't quite expected, considering the resentment he had carried for decades. He could only focus on what's important right now; saving Kenzie.

"Are you able to deal with the lightning?" Zac asked.

She didn't immediately answer but rather waved her hand. Zac didn't immediately understand what she was doing, but his eyes widened in shock when Thea suddenly appeared right between them, her hair wet as she looked around with terror.

"Thea!" Zac exclaimed with a sinking feeling. "Mom, what's going on?!"

Thea looked at Zac with incomprehension before her eyes turned to Leandra who still radiated an undeniable might. She was clearly having trouble processing what was going on, and who could blame her?

"She floated outside this island on a treasure, hidden by a few low-grade arrays," Leandra said, making Zac look at his girlfriend with confusion.

"I- I wanted to understand what's going on. You two have been acting full of secrecy for years, building hidden factories, and these restricted islands. I wanted to make sure..." Thea stammered. "I didn't want to hurt anyone, just help out in case something went wrong. I-"

"The Zero Affinity Container has a complicated relationship to the Kayar-Elu and the Root Compact, but it is still our blood flowing through his veins. You are not worthy," Leandra cut her off with an emotionless face. "But you will still get a chance to serve in the undertaking."

"What are you-" Zac interjected, but he suddenly found himself unable to speak.

Thea looked like she had been physically hit, her eyes wide as she looked back and forth between Zac and Leandra. Zac had an extremely bad feeling, and he wanted to scream for her to run away. But he couldn't as much as blink, and neither could Thea from the looks of it as she slowly floated up in the air as a series of intricate patterns appeared around her.

"Since when has the Cursed Heavens allowed itself to be denied?" Leandra muttered, her face once more a mask of fury. But Zac barely heard her as his attention was on Thea moving ever closer to the sky. "How can that conniving ball of greed and wild ambition let a threat be? Even if it has to break the covenant, so what? It will just make some reparations to satiate its own deluded sense of equilibrium."

'Stop!' Zac screamed in his mind since his mouth wouldn't move, praying that his mother could hear him. 'I'll do anything!'

"You might feel my actions unfair, but your understanding is too narrow. I am also doing this for the sake of her clan. I can sense that her love for you is real, but her allegiance to her clan is stronger,"

Leandra said. "You cannot comprehend the danger someone cursed by the Heavens will bring upon his surroundings. A small tribe such as hers will be ripped apart by the torrents of fate if they are tied to your chariot."

Zac kept raging in his mind for his mother to put Thea down, telling her that his girlfriend had nothing to do with whatever compact she rambled on about. Rage turned to pleas of mercy, to stop whatever she was doing. But it was all for naught. Thea's eyes rolled into her head as the scripts covered the last part of her body, and the next moment she was pushed through the barriers keeping the torrential lightning at bay.

The whole world turned white, and Zac's mind went blank.

A second later the sea of lightning was simply gone, as were the encapsulated Thea. Remaining was just one thin streak of blue that slowly descended from the sky and entered the cocoon shielding Kenzie. Zac felt like his mind had stopped, that he was having a twisted fever nightmare, but it was all too real.

His mother had actually used Thea as a lightning rod to divert and exhaust the tribulation.

Leandra gazed at the sky for a few seconds before she nodded in satisfaction, like she hadn't just sacrificed a human being. It was like Thea had never been on the island, and the pressure that had bound Zac was lifted. The lingering lightning completely entered the barriers surrounding Kenzie, and it started beating like a heart.

"Why? WHY?!" Zac immediately roared, his rage threatening to turn him insane. "You come back after all this time, and the first thing you do is something insane like this?! You are crazy!"

"Our family bears the weight of destiny," Leandra sighed. "Our lives belong to the Cosmos. Do not get distracted. Your role might have become unclear with how things have progressed, but you are still part of the Kayar-Elu. If you are unhappy with my actions, become stronger. Don't waste your breath on the mundane. The moment you reach the peak and fulfill your fate, you will gain Eternity. What will you lack then? Even killing me out vengeance will be as easy as taking a breath."

Zac looked into Leandra's eyes, and he saw an unquenchable conviction that even eclipsed that of the zealots from the Church of Everlasting Dao. He knew then and there that there was no way to reason with his mother. She was a true extremist, and she only cared about her goals. She wholeheartedly believed she had done a good deed by using Thea to deal with the Tribulation.

"Now, don't do anything untoward. I don't wish to wipe the memories of you two unless I have to. Each erasure will harm your souls and weaken your potential. We will leave, and MacKenzie's future will be far brighter than it could ever be in this remote Sector. Staying next to you will only bring calamity down on you both," Leandra said as she pointed at the pulsating cocoon.

A few seconds passed as Zac found himself locked in an internal struggle. Part of him wanted to throw everything away and attack Leandra even if it meant dying, while part of him feared that doing something stupid would implicate his sister. He had already realized that his Annihilation Sphere was useless to a being like this.

Just like the Administrator, she could simply stop him in his tracks with a thought, preventing him from even unleashing the skill.

In the end, he found himself rooted in place, his fear overcoming his rage. He could only look on as his sister emerged while he was being overwhelmed by a relentless storm of rage, guilt, and powerlessness. Kenzie looked around with confusion until she noticed Leandra. Zac died a little inside as he saw his sister's eyes light up, and he could barely hold back tears of frustration as Kenzie ran over to hug their mother.

"My child... We finally meet. You've worked hard," Leandra said with a smile as she caressed Kenzie's hair. "I have dreamed of this day for so long, but the two of us have to leave. I can only trick the Heavens for so long."

"What?" Kenzie asked with a start, looking at their mother with confusion before she looked over at Zac with an inquiring gaze. "We're leaving, just the two of us? What about Zac?"

"The situation is complicated, but suffice to say I left a gift with each of you upon your birth. Unfortunately, these two powers being in such close proximity has proven dangerous," Leandra sighed. "Besides, your brother has already confirmed his Path. His cultivation is one of a solitary warrior. Me bringing him with us will only hurt him in the end."

"Zac?" Kenzie asked with confusion.

"I... I'm not done with the Zecia sector yet," Zac said with a hoarse voice and a sickly smile, hiding his true feelings as deeply as he could as to not get his mind cleansed.

He wanted to etch the events of today deep into his bones, to never forget the madness of Leandra Atwood. Part of him wanted to forget how his secrecy caused Thea to take matters into her own hands and start to investigate their activities. But that voice of weakness was overshadowed by a fiery ball of fury that threatened to cause him to combust.

The Digital Nexus. The Kayar-Elu and the Root Compact. These would be his clues to one day right this wrong.