

The Fall 665

Chapter 665: Power

"Can't we all stay here together?" Kenzie entreated as she looked at Leandra.

"You have been discovered, child," Leandra sighed. "You tried to evolve with insufficient preparations. You staying here will put this whole world in danger. We need to leave for the Six Profundity Empire. Unless something unexpected happens, we will be able to enter an Immemorial Realm there."

Kenzie turned to Zac, who could only nod in what he hoped to be a comforting manner.

"Ok... But you need to help me with two things," Kenzie said with determination. "First, you need to save a certain person. I'm sure you can do it with your power."

"Save someone?" Leandra said as a frown spread across her face, causing Zac to get a sinking feeling.

"He's called Ogras, and he saved my life," Kenzie said as a screen appeared in front of her.

It was no doubt the product of Jeeves, and it rapidly started flashing images and symbols for two seconds before it disappeared. Zac could only understand snippets, but he had seen a few scenes from the events three years ago.

"Oh, so something like that happened in the Research Base?" Leandra sighed as a spatial tear opened next to her. "So much for my preparations."

A few streams of light entered the void, but she soon shook her head as the gate closed.

"A Dimensional Seed is a sentient treasure, and it is in its growing stages. It has moved to an area the cultivators in this Sector call the Million Gates Territory. The dense Spatial Energies there will nurture it. It would be impossible to save the demonling now as the seed has hidden between the folds of reality. But in a decade or two the seed should be satiated and bloom. At that point you simply need to find the pocket world it has created and pick the demonling up," Leandra said.

"How can we find him?" Kenzie asked hurriedly. "Can you tell if he, if they, are alive?"

"As long as one is in the area, it will be hard to miss the opening. The blooming of a Dimensional Seed gives off tremendous energy signatures, and tens of millions will enter its dimension in search of treasure," Leandra smiled. "It is a brand-new dimension, rife with echoes of the Origin. Your friends were alive when entering the Hidden Realm, and they have gained a rare opportunity in a sense. Their cultivation environment should be almost at the level of an Ancient Realm."

"They're really alive?!" Kenzie exclaimed with happiness written all over her face, though it soon scrunched up with disappointment. "A decade or two, though?"

"Child, you should understand. We will have long left the sector by then. I can only provide this much guidance," she said.

"I'll go pick him up when it's time," Zac said when he saw Kenzie's look. "I was planning on going there anyway."

“Right, okay...” Kenzie said, though reluctance was written all over her face. “Secondly, help me finish this array. It’s for Zac.”

Zac looked on as Kenzie took out an extremely densely inscribed array disk the next moment, and another wave of sorrow hit him.

“An illusion array meant for his Core? Exquisite work, but unfortunately it won’t work. Your understanding of the Dao is too limited to hide that thing from Class-4 cultivators. Luckily, I was already prepared for this. The Kayar-Elu have long perfected the methods to walk freely among those who have tied their chariot to the cursed heavens,” Leandra said as she took out a crystal and turned to Zac.

“What a disappointment. You cannot imagine the resources that went into fusing your bloodline with a perfected Duplicity Core. You could have used it to become the incarnation of the Machine God, yet you sullied it with the mark of the unliving. Still, our preparations will work just as well in this situation.”

Zac wanted to simply throw the crystal away as it floated into his hands, but he restrained himself and tried to appear thankful as he put it away.

“It is an almost perfected array that can hide your unique situation. Monarchs and weaker Autarchs will be unable to see through its disguise, and those above will not care about your situation. It will also impede any attempt at looking into the truth of your being. Even stronger Autarchs will have their perception subverted to some degree, thinking they found nothing out of the norm from your status screen or body.

“However, its impenetrable disguise comes at a price. You will not be able to change back and forth when the array is active. If you break the seal to change your constitution, it will take a month before you can hide your core again,” Leandra said before she turned back to Kenzie.

“Child, it is time. Every second we spend will increase the threat to this world. I will put you into my Inner World,” Leandra said.

“Okay, one moment,” Kenzie sighed as she walked over and hugged Zac. “Take care until we meet again.”

“Be careful,” Zac said with a low volume. “It’s dangerous out there. Trust no one.”

That was as far as he dared go, but he couldn’t let Kenzie disappear without giving at least a small warning. The next moment his sister was gone, leaving only Leandra behind.

“I can feel the fury that churns in your heart. You were just a baby who didn’t choose to be brought into the world or to be forced into our cause. But you still carry the Original Sin. You are the source of the ruin of our clan, the reason for the death of five hundred billion people,” she said as she looked at Zac with mixed emotions.

“Our paths will diverge from here on out, our Karma is severed. I will not kill you, but neither will I help you any further from today. If you come looking for us, you better be powerful enough to kill me,” Leandra said with a staid face, as though her deranged words were something normal for a mother to say to her son. “Or you will fall even before getting close to your sister.”

A prompt appeared that said Nexus Coins had been transferred to him, but Zac waved it away with annoyance. Was his mother really trying to buy him off after what she did?

"That's not up to you to decide!" Zac roared.

He could no longer hold back the anger bubbling in his chest now that Kenzie wasn't here. He was just so furious that he didn't know what to do with himself. He was angry at his sister for hiding the risks with the evolution. Angry at himself for passively letting things proceed until they reached this point and for hiding the truth about his activities, which ended up implicating Thea.

But most of all he was angry at Leandra who had proven herself so needlessly cruel and murderous. He refused to believe that the only way for his mother to save Kenzie was to kill someone close to him. His wrath was met by a cold indifference though, which only poured oil on the fire.

"Your sister is the harbinger of the Final Era, but she cannot fulfill her destiny in this destitute corner of the universe. I am taking her to a more appropriate stage," Leandra said as the purple and futuristic dress covered in Technocrat scripts on her body shuddered, turning into a beautiful robe.

Zac's eyes looked on with incomprehension. It felt like he wasn't looking at a Technocrat any longer, but rather someone like Be'Zi; a supreme cultivator. A swirling vortex opened behind her the next moment, and it looked exactly like the portal the System showed him during his mind tribulation.

"Farewell... my son."

A second later she was gone, leaving Zac utterly, completely alone.

"This is your inner world?" Kenzie asked as she looked out across the endless vista with amazement written all over her face.

She was standing at the top of a ten-kilometer-tall spire looking out through a window, and the surroundings were simply marvelous. There was a bustling metropolis below, though it was impossible to tell whether people actually lived there from this far up. There was a lot of movement though, but it was entirely possible that it was all machinery.

The town was tens of times larger than Port Atwood, but yet it only took up a small pocket of space in this seemingly endless world.

Rather than an inner world, it almost looked like they were standing in the normal universe. A huge nebula in a mesmerizing purple covered the sky, and various zones of perfectly harmonious biospheres formed a layer around the sprawling city. Far in the distance, she could vaguely see more cities, each of them centered around a spire much like this one.

"For cultivators, to build your inner world is to shore up your foundation. The more you manage to expand and stabilize it, the greater force you will be able to bring out. After all, each movement of yours will contain the will of a world," Leandra said from the side. "From there, you impart it with truth, making it follow your Heavenly Law."

"Just... how powerful are you, mom?" Kenzie hesitantly asked.

"I once was a Class-5 Autarch," Leandra sighed. "But our family encountered a calamity which almost eradicated us. If not for your grandfather I would be dead. He sacrificed himself to give me a chance. But

I was still wounded, and it will take a long time before I am restored. Right now, my strength is somewhere between Peak Class-4 and Class-5."

"Why couldn't we bring Zac with us though? Now he's left all alone," Kenzie said with redrimmed eyes.

"There's nothing to be done," Leandra said with a pained face. "You should have come to understand a few things through your connection to... Jeeves. Zac and Jeeves were once meant to be a pair, each one half of a whole. But the implications of this fusion triggered the wrath of the System, which led to our doom.

"Zac and Jeeves barely survived the calamity thanks to my father's efforts. But their very existence was punished, their fate subverted. That thankfully is your key to survival. The System is forced to follow a few Heavenly laws older than time itself, one of them being the law of balance. The two have been punished for their existence and survived, which will allow them to continue living.

"But as long as the threat reaches a certain threshold, the System will subvert the will of the Heavens and attack you, no matter the cost. More importantly, your brother has been marked by the System, and it is actively watching. It was because of him being close to you that the Tribulation Lightning descended. I needed to sever your Karma, as you two siblings will bring calamity upon each other," Leandra said.

"Still," Kenzie said hesitantly.

"Don't you worry about your brother. He was meant to become the perfect Cultivator. He might have had that fate taken from him, but it seems that calamity has opened a few unexpected doors instead. He is free in a way I've never seen before, in a way I didn't know existed. But Zac will need to figure out his path on his own. Outside interference will just harm him," Leandra explained.

"Become stronger. Right now, you are just a victim to the heavens, a leaf blowing in the wind. But by the time you reach the peak, you will be able to control the winds of fate," Leandra said. "And I'll help you. You have accomplished an impressive amount in the few short years after the Corruption, but Jeeves was ultimately not designed to be housed by a normal human."

"So what do I need to do?" Kenzie asked.

"We need to improve your very foundations; Your soul and your constitution. Only then will you survive the evolution, while also setting up a proper path for your cultivation. The path of Technomancy is full of endless potential, but it ultimately not for you. With how Jeeves has changed, you will need to become a proper cultivator. Unfortunately, your foundations are currently average at best," Leandra explained as the room they stood in started to transform.

The windows overlooking the world turned into screens covered in all kinds of information. Kenzie looked around, and she was shocked by the esoteric information the texts contained. It felt like they dug straight at the core of cultivation itself.

"For now, we're moving to a more flourishing place where we will be able to work on your cultivation. But it will take a few years before we reach the wormhole that will take us there. I wish that I could accompany you during that time, but I need to enter secluded cultivation to recuperate.

"I have suppressed your body to maintain its momentum and avoid detection of the System," Leandra added. "Work on shoring up your theoretical foundations. With the help of Jeeves and the tower's resident AI, you will make more progress in a few years compared to what most scions accomplish in centuries."

Kenzie nodded, and Leandra smiled and ruffled her hair one last time before she disappeared without as much as creating a ripple. Kenzie wasn't surprised to learn about the suppression, she had already felt a subtle change in her body since waking up. Thankfully, that seal didn't block everything.

[Do you want me to stop?]

'No, maintain control over my expressions,' Kenzie answered bleakly with a thought as she sat down in a chair arranged for her. 'She is probably recording.'

Kenzie kept looking at the screen, and while Jeeves was diligently absorbed all the knowledge laid bare her thoughts were elsewhere. The scenes of Leandra treating Zac, her own son, like a stranger now that he couldn't help her with her plans. How she sacrificed Thea without a shred of remorse. It all kept repeating in a loop.

She had been wrong. So fundamentally, irrevocably wrong.

It was all her fault. Her fault that Thea was gone, that Zac was left alone to pick up the broken pieces. It felt like she would collapse at any moment, and she had long given up on controlling her own body out of fear of reprisal. What if Leandra saw something was wrong and decided to do something even crazier, like destroy Earth altogether?

That was her only chance at turning things around, that Leandra didn't seem to fully understand the changes that Jeeves had undergone. Her mother thought she had him completely under control, but there was still a small core of true life that she couldn't touch. It was that part that had recorded everything that transpired while she was unconscious, turning it into a hidden memory that she gained the moment she was teleported to this place.

She felt like a fool, a dangerous fool. Zac had warned her so many times, exhorted her to proceed with caution. That Leandra might not be the powerful mother that was forced away from Earth to protect them, but rather a calculating cultivator who had long lost things like familial warmth. He had been right. She only cared about the undertaking of her clan, considering her children just as the next generation of soldiers in their war against the System.

But was she so different? Kenzie had known there were very real risks with her plan, but she had discarded them in her frantic pursuit of power. Zac believed that Jeeves had been telling her that everything was fine, but it had repeatedly tried to convince her to slow down. To first strengthen herself just like her mother planned.

Arrogance. She realized now that her mental state had steadily deteriorated since the events of the Mystic Realm. People kept calling her a genius of an era, mastering everything from Dao to Arrays to even Technocrat tech. It had blown up her confidence, convinced her of her infallibility. She was a unique genius, how could her deductions be wrong?

It was all a lie. What genius? It was all Jeeves. He kept knocking down the barriers in her cultivation, she simply proceeded on the path staked out for her. She was nothing like her brother who had earned every part of his power through endless struggle, she had been given everything. She was ultimately just a random girl just past 23 years old with a sapient supercomputer in her head.

Now everything was ruined. Zac was scarred for life, Thea was sacrificed, and she found herself at the core of some insane struggle she wanted no part of. What should she do? What could she do?

[The Creator was right. You are lacking power. The moment you can overpower the Creator, you can freely control your fate again.]

Kenzie slowly nodded as she steeled her heart.

She would drink the poisonous water of Leandra's teachings if it meant power. Only if she reached the peak would she be able to right her wrongs. She thought back to the beautiful town on the small island in the middle of nowhere, the slice of paradise Zac had created for them. A wave of homesickness hit her like a truck, but she could only push the feelings down.

She thought of her brother, constantly struggling to protect those around him, his eyes full of exhaustion, yet never stopping. She would have to stop completely relying on Jeeves and grow so that she could right this wrong.

[The Creator wanted Zachary Atwood to feel the curse of helplessness, of loss. To instill emotion powerful enough to shock his momentum awake. Emotion is the bridge between Dao and Man. I shared the events because you needed to feel the same.]

Kenzie inwardly nodded as she focused on the screen in front of her. One day she would return, whatever it took.