

The Fall 667

Chapter 667: Einherjar

Zac knew what Henry was talking about. The moment the grace period ended and its shroud was lifted, then Earth would most likely find itself inside the sphere of influence of some faction of the Zecia Sector. It could be within the borders of an interplanetary clan, or inside some empire like the Dravorak Dynasty or the Allbright Empire.

In either case, their appearance wouldn't go unnoticed, and their treatment would largely depend on their strength and what kind of faction they were attached to. A new planet with prominent progenitors would probably get treated as promising elites to integrate into the fold, and the citizens would lead pretty carefree lives.

However, if the planet was just filled with wastrels, the reception would get a lot worse. Zac had read records where citizens of newly assimilated worlds were essentially turned into cannon-fodder for wars or had their home planets terraformed into factory worlds with a toxic atmosphere. The System wouldn't interfere if it was unsatisfied with the planet's performance.

The Assimilation would also bring some new challenges for its population, and the planet might even undergo some changes like gaining new Mystic Realms. Zac was generally confident about the situation, but it was possible that the System would add some sort of twist to the Assimilation since someone like him was the Planetary Leader of Earth.

Henry obviously wanted him to take a step back and stay on as a protective umbrella for humanity, to not take undue risks. Going after Leandra was obviously a goal fraught with danger. However, would Zac really back away against the challenge, or would he rise up as Emily wanted?

The very core of Zac's being was set ablaze at the thought of letting things rest. It roared in defiance at the prospect of just moving on, to stay and continue to slowly accumulate on Earth. There was no way he would ever see Kenzie again that way, no way for him to mete out punishment. Every fiber of his body urged him was forward so that he would never have to feel this powerless again.

"I understand where you're coming from, but I will never let this matter go," Zac said with a shake of his head as a fire ignited in his eyes. "I will leave Earth very soon to temper myself. I'm not sure how long I will be gone."

"Alas," Henry sighed as he turned back toward the stele, his back hunched even lower.

"It will definitely take more than a hundred years before I can go after that cultivator though, and I will be here for the Assimilation. Unless I fall before that," Zac said as he stepped onto the stairs. "Once again, I'm sorry for your loss."

Zac quickly left the hidden room, his thoughts a whirl as he flashed toward the closest Teleportation Array. Hearing about the Marshall Clan's origins had brought up some things he had pushed away until now.

The truth about his own heritage.

Leandra had all but admitted that he had been experimented on. Both his bloodline and his Specialty Core were something the Kayar-Elu, if that was his mother's organization, had implanted in him. That also made it impossible for Robert Atwood to be his biological father. It didn't come as a surprise to him by this point, but having it confirmed still hurt a bit.

Zac stepped onto the array, and he appeared back in Port Atwood moments later, this time at the entrance of his Cultivation Cave. He sent a stream of energy into the miniature Pagoda he always carried, which meant that Triv would come over as soon as it could.

Meanwhile, he took a deep breath and stabilized his mind as he walked inside and sat down. The pit of guilt and sorrow was still there, but there was also a burning ember of conviction. He had almost completely given in to despair after seeing how impossibly powerful his mother was, but meeting Emily and Henry shook him awake.

No matter if it took ten, fifty, or a million years, he'd get Kenzie back and avenge Thea. There was even the chance of bringing Thea back to life, though Zac honestly didn't hold much hope in that regard. It felt like clinging to something like that was like a crutch that would sully her memory. If he managed to reach such a level, he'd definitely do it, but until then he wouldn't delude himself about her situation.

But for now, he needed to get a move on if he ever wanted to have a chance to catch up. Zac fought with reluctance for a few minutes until he finally opened his status screen, something he had avoided until this point. All of it looked the same as before, except for one part.

Nexus Coins

[D] 1 000 000

Zac blankly looked at the line in for a few moments, his mouth opening and closing upon realizing it was D-grade Nexus Coins he was looking at, not E-grade like he had before. One million D-grade Nexus Coins, what kind of wealth was that? Zac had managed to accumulate around 100,000 E-grade Nexus Coins in cash reserves before, mostly thanks to his sister's lucrative business spilling over into his wallet.

One hundred thousand E-grade Nexus Coins were the equivalent of One hundred billion F-grade nexus coins, a massive fortune for most E-Grade cultivators. Yet all that wealth was just 0.1 D-grade Nexus Coin, so little that it didn't even leave a dent on his updated status screen. Three years of accumulation as a Planetary Lord wasn't anything but a rounding error in the presence of this terrifying amount of money.

His mind almost short-circuited, and he couldn't help but question everything as he saw the number. Was there something he had misunderstood about Leandra Atwood? Why would she give him such a shocking sum of money? Was it just pocket-change to her, or perhaps a way to sever Karma? Why would she bankroll him if she knew that he would be gunning for her? Was she just that confident that he'd never catch up even after all he had accomplished until this point?

He couldn't figure it out at all, and he could only close the Status screen with more questions plaguing his mind than before.

This amount of wealth opened all kinds of avenues for him, but Zac was still full of reluctance. That was essentially blood money in his book. Wouldn't using it mean he somewhat accepted what took place

two weeks ago? But he also couldn't just throw that wealth away. He knew that cultivating as a mortal required shocking amounts of wealth. The E-grade was just the start. If he acted to uncompromising he might find himself stuck in a bottleneck, and how would he save Kenzie then?

Thankfully, a deathly gust dragged him out of his impasse as his ghost butler arrived.

"Lord, I came as soon as you called. My condolences. Miss Marshall was a lovely girl," the ghost said. "How about-"

"No," Zac said without hesitation. "I'm ambivalent as it is about doing it with my enemies. I won't turn my allies unless they ask me to. Besides, there wasn't even a body left. But speaking of, how is the Einherjar?"

"They are improving every day. A few shows promise that would even be considered rare back in my Kingdom. Lady Vilari in particular keeps impressing. A body like hers would have caused a storm back home. She has already formed her first Dao Fragment, and she shows no indication of having exhausted her potential of the F-Grade. Only Rhuger is anywhere close."

"Good," Zac slowly nodded. "Have Vilari come over tomorrow. I have something to give her."

The Einherjar was a project Zac started in secret two years ago which only Kenzie and Triv knew about. The progress of the people of Earth had caused Zac some pressure, and he realized that he needed more powerful, and absolutely loyal, followers if he wanted to keep the situation on Earth stable while he was off-planet. That had become extra important now that he had lost both Kenzie and Thea.

Triv had provided him with the solution; undead followers. It was something the ghost had been advocating since day one, and Zac eventually relented soon after returning from the Mystic Realm. However, he didn't quite follow Triv's suggestions and instead spent months looking for ways that undead naturally formed.

After all, the normal arrays and Lich methods looted from the Undead Incursion contained the hidden compulsions of the Primo, and Zac didn't want to spend time and effort only to nurture a hostile army. Finally, he had found a way to create a purified cursed ground in one of the deathly hotspots on Earth. He had his sister set up a series of energy-gathering arrays, along with a few esoteric arrays that would help the awakening of the dead.

The solution hadn't actually come from some of Adriel's missives or Information Crystals bought from the Undead Empire, but rather the opposite. Their solution was found in a missive sold by the "Empire of Light", a smaller empire in the Zecia Sector which had the misfortune of sharing galactic borders with the local chapter of the Undead Empire.

Unsurprisingly, their whole culture centered around defeating and eradicating the undead, and they had ample information about spotting undead infections and how to prevent Revenants from rising across battlefields rife with deathly energies. Zac and Kenzie had, with the somewhat reluctant help of Triv, managed to reverse-engineer the process through the warnings.

Zombies would essentially rise by themselves sooner or later as long as corpses were left in deathly energies strong enough. However, the key was to infuse them with a "seed of sapience", which would

help them awaken far quicker while also binding them to their progenitor. In Zac's case, it meant infusing the arrays with his own black ichor to form a connection.

The hard work had finally paid off after a year, with the first of the Einherjar awakening.

As for the source of the bodies, Zac had ample supply. He had maintained the somewhat macabre habit of collecting the corpses of his enemies to avoid leaving behind traces, and they were piled high in his 'Corpse Sack' by the time he had dealt with all the threats to Earth.

This had resulted in quite a few powerful warriors under his command. Some standouts were Cervantes, or rather Rhuger as he called himself now, and Pika, Leviala's new identity. Below them were roughly 50 stand-out Revenants mainly made up of Incursion Leaders and their generals, and then finally roughly two thousand general revenants.

There were also one hundred thousand zombies roaming the new continent as well, fighting the beasts to empower themselves. A few of them would awaken, while most would fall to the environment. These Zombies were different from those in the original Dead Zone, as those Zombies were all marked by the empire, whereas these new ones were marked by his ichor.

It was a bit of a wasteful method to have most zombies fight and kill to gain the energy necessary to reach E-grade race, but he simply didn't have the resources to evolve their constitution with arrays or medicinal baths. He only used those kinds of materials on his best corpses. Besides, while this ruthless training method would result in fewer subjects, each of them would be a lot more powerful since they were forged through slaughter.

The Revenant with the most potential was neither Cervantes nor Leviala, but rather the unnamed mentalist he met in the Tower of Eternity. She was now called Vilari, and her mental abilities were simply dreadful, even making Zac feel some pressure.

Rhuger was still having trouble completely awakening his bloodline, which wasn't surprising since Cervantes had worked on it for centuries. Regaining that kind of strength would take time and effort, and the body was, unfortunately, a bit too old for it to become a peak Revenant. As for Pika, her bloodline was pretty powerful, but she was after all still missing her eyes which was the core part of her power.

Meanwhile, Vilari held a potential that probably eclipsed both of the two Mystic Realm natives, and she was both young and in perfect condition. It was lucky that Vilari was completely loyal to him, as letting someone like her loose on Earth would spell disaster in a decade or two. Zac had great hopes for her, that she could become a pillar of Earth in the future.

But her potential was, unfortunately, being a bit wasted right now. Zac had therefore decided to give her a shot at the Crown of Despair-Inheritance. It did seem to be a mentalist inheritance, and Zac lacked any sort of foundation in that department apart from his Soul-Strengthening Manual.

He felt he was doing Vilari a disservice since he didn't really have any insights or skills to provide her, but she would hopefully find something useful in the inheritance trial. The only reason he had been holding back until now was that the opportunities were limited, and there wasn't a huge need to give her a power-up.

“She will be happy to hear that,” Triv nodded before he asked with a hesitant voice. “About those two... What is your plan?”

“I haven’t decided yet,” Zac sighed. “I still can’t believe they managed to cross the turbulent sea.”

The two Triv talked about were Krisko and Uyir, the man formerly known as Enigma. Of course, he was a Revenant now, and the husband of his Corpselord wife. The last living general of the Undead Incursion had mysteriously disappeared the moment the Incursion fell, and Enigma never returned to the Underworld Council.

Seeing as neither could be found, most had believed that the two fought and the battle ended with mutual destruction. However, it turned out that the truth was a bit more interesting. The two had battled, but they had ended up with grievous wounds rather than dying.

The battle had taken place inside the heart of the Dead Zone though, and even though the Lich King was dead and the incursion was gone, the Miasma was still extremely dense. It had seeped inside Enigma’s wounds, and he had quickly been converted to a Zombie even before he died. He had woken up as a supreme Zombie, and Krisko then helped him gain sapience over the following year.

They initially lived in the Dead Zone, but it quickly shrunk to the point that they feared they would be discovered. They somehow managed to find out about the second continent and its growing pockets of death and took the risk to cross the oceans, braving the chaotic storms and the massive sea beasts.

Unfortunately for them, they ran into the Einherjar and Zac who were out on a training mission just a few weeks after arriving at the unpopulated continent. Zac initially planned to simply execute them, but Triv had begged for Krisko’s life since she apparently had been good to him before.

The Ghost Butler had provided a huge amount of help over the past years, so Zac acquiesced. But that still left two powerful prisoners who he didn’t want to keep but also couldn’t send back to the Undead Empire.

They had seen the unaffiliated undead of Earth, and while there technically wasn’t any law that said that the Undead needed to be part of the Undead Empire, it was still considered a betrayal to be unattached among a lot of the imperials. Letting them return could cause any number of issues even if they didn’t know about Zac’s hidden class.

“Try to convince them to sign the same sort of contract as you,” Zac said. “For now, let no one disturb me until I call for you.”

“Of course,” Triv nodded and flickered away.

Zac soon walked over to the death-attuned side of the Life-Death Array, and another wave of melancholy hit him as he looked upon the intricate fractals surrounding his prayer mat. Kenzie had long reached the inscription proficiency to make a complementary Life-attuned Array Disk, but the setup in his Cultivation Cave was still more efficient to use because of the resources that had gone into nurturing the cave into a cultivation paradise.

The array hummed to life as Zac sat down. He immediately felt the two streams of power, Dao and Mental Energy, enter the array pathways. Zac grit his teeth with determination as he shut out all errant

thoughts. He had been hesitant for a few months now since he had reached a certain point. The point of his first Reincarnation.

However, every time he had started hitting against that final bottleneck he had gotten a sense of trepidation, like his life was in danger. Until now Zac hadn't wanted to risk it and instead opted to wait and accumulate some more. But now his soul was alit with purpose, and he refused to back down any longer.

He would push through this time no matter what.