

The Fall 488

Chapter 488: The Final Era

"Did you really plan on leaving while just leaving a note? What about Zac? What about our daughter?" Robert wheezed, his franticness turning to anger mid-sentence.

"Don't mention that little monster. And I am doing this for our daughter. She is destined for greatness," Leandra retorted. "Against all odds, she is an actual match. She will finish what her ancestors started tens of millions of years ago."

Another wave of pain intruded in his mind, but Zac growled as he forcibly pushed it away with far greater fervor than he had done before. He refused to be disturbed by the other tribulation at this point. He wasn't sure if this was all real or not, but he needed to hear what his parents were saying.

What the hell did she mean by calling him a monster? And what was with the ambiguous wording of his dad? His mind was running a mile a minute, but he had no chance to digest the words of his mother before she spoke up again.

"You know what? Why am I even-" his mother's continued, before a muffled scream followed by a thud came from the room on the other side of the corridor, his parent's room.

And the room where his sister slept.

"I'm sorry, Robert," Leandra sighed, her voice barely audible through the door. "In another lifetime, perhaps."

Terror was clearly written on the face of his younger self, but Zac still saw himself slowly open the door and sneak outside. There was a shining light coming from the next-door room, and he steeled himself before he glanced inside.

Only to lock eyes with Leandra who stood next to the crib, an unconscious Robert by her feet.

"You heard us?" she said as she looked at the younger Zac with an unperturbed face.

His younger self didn't say a word, but he only looked down at the unmoving form of his father, before his eyes turned back to his newly-born sister who still radiated a red light from her forehead.

"Some things have been set in motion that cannot be stopped. You were the first, and she is the second. Perhaps this is for the best, I was never happy with the original plan in any case," she said with a calm voice as she looked down at him. "And the heavens proved me right."

Zac observed his mother as a specter behind his younger self, and it felt like a wave of memories were awakened by the familiar face. However, there was a difference between the gentle woman that hazily appeared in the back of his mind, and the woman in front of him. The gentleness was utterly gone, replaced by far uglier emotions hiding within her eyes as she looked down at his younger self.

Disgust and rage.

He, or rather his ten-year-old self, was clearly in shock by the turn of events, but he still spoke up.

"Is Kenzie sick?" he said hesitantly as he fearfully took a step toward the crib.

“You want to protect her?” Leandra laughed. “Well, perhaps you can be good for something. I can’t stay here. My awakening has already alerted the Cursed Heavens and some other old bastards. Someone will need to stand guard as we rebuild from the ground up.”

It looked like his younger self received a shock the next second, and he fell over right next to Kenzie’s cradle. The present Zac was still there though, and he looked down at himself before his eyes once again turned back to Leandra.

It at least looked like she wasn’t aware of his existence, in contrast to Be’Zi and her husband who could sense his presence in his visions. She gave the two unmoving forms on the floor a long look before she once again focused on Kenzie, but Zac couldn’t understand what she was doing.

She stood unmoving with her hand on his sister’s infant head for a good ten minutes, but there were no changes and no energy fluctuations as far as Zac could tell.

“It can still be salvaged,” she breathed in relief as she took a step back.

The next moment she bent down and put her index finger against his forehead, and a shudder ran through his ten-year-old body. Finally, she walked over to a cabinet in the room, and a familiar item appeared in her hand; the pendant. She placed it next to a paper before she took one last look at the room where she had lived the past ten years.

“Keep her safe. I’ll be back to claim her after I’ve dealt with this mess,” she mumbled down at Robert, or perhaps himself. “She is carrying the fate of the Final Era.”

A rift opened up in space the next moment, and she walked right through it without a second glance.

Confusion muddled his thoughts as he tried to make sense of the vision. Was this really what happened twenty years ago when his mother disappeared? Had she wiped his memory of the actual events, planting the story of her mysterious disappearance?

And what was with her reaction to him? Zac didn't remember her fondly due to her abandonment as a child, but he had to admit that she had been nothing but a good mother before she disappeared. But the eyes of Leandra had been those of a fanatic on a mission, almost reminding Zac of Salvation.

There was one possibility that immediately came to mind though; Robert wasn't his biological father.

It might even be possible that Leandra wasn't his mother, but his instincts told him they were mother and son. They had a lot of similar features, especially their eyes who looked identical. But perhaps her hatred was a projection of any animosity she carried for his biological father?

That was the only reason he could think of that would explain the hatred from his own flesh and blood.

Leandra's grand proclamations of carrying out the will of the ancestors and the 'Fate of the Final Era' also felt extremely ominous, and not something he wanted Kenzie to get embroiled in. But was it really up to him, or was their mother really coming back to take Kenzie away?

A mother reuniting with her children might seem like something good, but there was something deeply wrong with the way Leandra had looked at Kenzie as well, though there wasn't the unmasked hatred she held for Zac. Was Leandra just using her as nourishment for Jeeves, where the mysterious AI was using Kenzie and her soul as an incubation chamber until the point that Leandra came to steal it?

That would explain why the AI had taken so long to awaken. It only happened months after the integration was over according to his Sister. Had it fed on her soul until that point, slowing her progression and weakening her potential?

Then again, all this was just conjecture, his frayed mind running amok from not knowing whether this was real or fake. Was this just the System messing with his head, preying on his fears, causing a bout of paranoia that would trap him in this illusion forever? Or was it trying to create a rift between himself and his mother, making sure that he never joined Leandra's camp?

Did the System have other plans for him?

Zac's mind was a mess, and he felt a weird sense of disconnect with reality like he had been living a lie his whole life. The whole room around him started to twist and contort like it tried to superimpose on his own sense of reality.

His emotions started to spiral out of control, but Zac quickly stabilized his thoughts. He knew that these feelings were mostly fake. This was the Heart Tribulation. The System had shown him an illusion that had caused a crack in his mental fortitude, and it had tried to push him toward insanity from there.

But his mind wasn't so easily shaken, not after all the things he had gone through the past year. He had looked at the Terminus and survived, how could this compare? Perhaps the things he had seen were real, perhaps they weren't. It wasn't much that he could do about it in either case if he didn't get stronger.

The fact that their mother might have ulterior motives about Kenzie had been something that Zac had considered a real possibility since the moment he figured out their origin. Witnessing this scene did nothing to change that. He would still keep his guard up for anything that might come his way.

It was the same with his own heritage. Perhaps Robert wasn't his biological father, but so what? He had been as real a father as any could have been. The fact that there might be some other guy out there didn't matter in the slightest to Zac, he could just be considered a sperm donor at best if it even was true. There was no point in looking into the matter any further.

It was far more important to keep improving and get stronger.

Only then would he be able to achieve his goals, only then would he be able to feel a sense of safety and freedom. He needed to become stronger to protect his sister and everyone else that had come to mean something to him over the past year. To protect Earth itself against those who wished it harm.

The room drenched in the red glow cracked, and he immediately found himself back in his body, the real one. He didn't know exactly what had changed, but he somehow felt stable, like he could face anything with a calm heart. Was this a hidden benefit of succeeding against the Heart Tribulation?

He breathed out in relief, but he quickly remembered that he wasn't out of the woods just yet. He just overcame the Heart Tribulation, but there was still the Soul Tribulation to deal with. Just before he was dragged into the illusion he had felt like his soul was lit on fire, and it had made itself remembered multiple times during the hallucinations as well.

Another wave of terrifying agony assaulted him the moment he remembered his predicament, setting his whole world on fire. He screamed in pain, but he quickly activated the Fragment of the Axe and

spread it across his whole soul. The Soul was the connection to the Dao, and his fragments would be able to dampen the effect of the Tribulation from what he knew.

And thankfully, the searing pain quieted down by a noticeable degree the moment his soul was covered in a dense layer of his Dao. It was just like when he used the Seed of Trees to ward off the corruption in the wound that Mhal left in his side. However, the mysterious energy that had descended upon him was still there in full force, meaning he wasn't safe just because his tactic had worked out.

Zac quickly looked inwards and breathed out in relief when he saw that his soul was fine apart from some small wounds that could be fixed with a normal Soul Healing Pill. It was a lot better than he had feared after having felt those bouts of agony during the Heart Tribulation, and nothing compared to the time after the Shard had ripped it apart and ensconced itself in the tears.

But one part was a bit worrying. The scars were still there, and not only did they seem more integrated with his soul, but they had now regained some of their luster. Had they somehow managed to feed on whatever energy the System used to put his soul under pressure?

The pain quickly got worse though, making Zac unable to gather any further clues from the scars. The Dao energy of the Axe was somehow losing its efficacy, but Zac had an idea and swapped to the Fragment of the Coffin. The pain became manageable once more, and Zac soon set into a cyclic pattern where he moved from one Dao Fragment to another to handle the Soul Tribulation.

Zac lost track of time as he just focused on enduring, but it gradually grew harder as the effect grew steadily worse, even if he kept swapping between Daos. However, a sudden shudder from within his soul suddenly blasted his defenses straight open, giving the tribulation energy free access to his soul.

However, Zac felt no pain at all as two whirlpools appeared, one black and one white, and they dragged the Tribulation Energy into the abyss with extreme fervor. Zac was shocked to see that the energy didn't go into the scars though, but the other side of the whirlpools were clearly inside the cage that housed the two Remnants.

Both of them seemed enlivened, and they started fighting with each other once more. However, they quickly calmed down and focused on absorbing the unwilling Tribulation Energies. Zac tried to figure out a way to break the connection, but he couldn't destroy the two whirlpools no matter what he did.

However, it thankfully looked like he had the System on his side this time. It Seemed that it considered him having passed the second Tribulation as well as the Soul Tribulation was actually becoming food, and the energies around Zac dissipated the next second. Better yet, the Fractals of the cage woke up once more and stole most of the energy from the Remnants.

They looked clearly upset about the situation as they slammed their tendrils against the walls, but the cage didn't even shudder as it continued its siphoning. A few minutes later a surge of extremely pure energies seeped into his soul and body, and he felt extremely invigorated. The wounds on his soul closed by themselves, and he felt a huge surge of power coursing through his body.

He had made it, he was finally an E-Grade Mortal.