

## The Fall 320

### Chapter 320: Karmic Ties

"Abbot Everlasting Peace is looking for me?" Zac said with some worry. "Are they under attack?"

"I have no idea, but it doesn't seem like it," Kenzie said with some hesitation. "But it seemed pretty important."

Zac frowned thoughtfully as he wondered what the old monk could need from him at this juncture. If their mountain wasn't under attack by the undead the other most likely reason was that there was some issue related to Karma. That old man seemed to have a miraculous insight into that mysterious Dao, to the point that Zac suspected that the old man possessed an advanced Dao Fragment.

"There's no need to be so serious, just go over there and see what he wants. You'll get wrinkles if you keep scrunching up your face like that," Kenzie said with a shake of her head.

Zac snorted but he felt what she said made sense. There was no point in guessing when he could simply check the situation himself. But he first wanted to heal his arm in case the visit would lead to a battle with the zombies.

"I'll go tomorrow, I want my bones to properly set first," Zac said after some consideration. "Ogras will construct a stable gate to the Mystic Realm as soon as possible. We'll set up an outpost inside to keep sensitive matters, such as Salvation's things. You can go over whenever you feel ready to look into things."

"Sure," Kenzie said with some interest. "I wanted to see that place anyway. It's like we found an enormous space station."

"Stay inside the sealed area though, and have a handful of Valkyries always accompany you. There were some odd beasts inside that were almost evolved," Zac said with some worry.

He was afraid that his sister would do something drastic given the opportunity, and Zac would be down in the core of the planet fighting Fire Golems.

"I'm not stupid," Kenzie said with a roll of her eyes. "Remember I survived both the tutorial and living next to the Dead Zone for months."

"I just worry," Zac said with a smile.

Zac spent the rest of the day recuperating in the cave while consolidating his recent Dao improvements. Since he and Ogras rushed out of the Cradle of God he didn't have time to stop and get a sense of his improved seeds, but now that he was finally home he opened up his menu to take a proper look again.

Heaviness (Peak): Strength +90, Endurance +25, Wisdom +5

Sanctuary (High): Endurance +25, Intelligence +10, Wisdom +25.

He was pretty happy with the attributes both the seeds provided. Heaviness had gained mostly Strength as expected, but Sanctuary had changed a bit from giving mainly Wisdom to providing an even split between Endurance and Wisdom instead.

The situation also made him ponder what he should do in regards to his Dao. Yrial wanted him to get the fragments for Life and Death before evolving which would allow him to gain a class that was centered on that concept. However, he was far closer to getting a Fragment related to the Dao of Axe than one of Death as it stood. He still wasn't used to Rot and Hardness was still only at the Middle stage, making the road to get both to Peak pretty arduous.

Perhaps he could boost them if their plan with Salvation's array worked out, but Zac was more inclined to use that opportunity to form his first Fragment instead. Perhaps getting a Fragment of Axe would be enough to evolve both his classes, which would be for the best since he wasn't in a position to delay evolving for too long.

The problem was that he was stumbling in the dark since the System didn't provide any hints to what the results of his actions would be. If he got a fragment of axe and life and then evolved, would he veer away from his Life-death cycle to a simpler evolved axeman? Would that even be a problem?

He finally gave up trying to decide on the spot what to do. He would simply have to see how things progressed and take things one step at a time. Worrying about fragments was a bit premature. He didn't only need to improve his seeds to the peak but also master them to the point that he would be able to fuse them into something that made sense.

When Zac woke up the next day he could move his arm again, though it was still a bit tender. Between his enormous pool of Vitality and expensive pills, he was like a troll from the old tales, regenerating at monstrous speeds.

The morning was spent on some more meditation before he got up and left for the teleporter after saying goodbye to his sister. He wasn't planning on bringing anyone to Mount Everlasting Peace, and he soon found himself at the foot of the sacred mountain. It wasn't the first time seeing the thousands of characters inscribed into the mountain walls, but he was still awed by the sight.

Not much had changed in the months since he came here last time, and the normalcy of the atmosphere was a bit surreal in of itself. One difference though was that no people were staying at the foot of the mountain like the last time. People had likely left the area when the undead horde started spreading, turning this place into an isolated pocket with death all around.

Even the monks were all but missing, leaving the fields completely untended. The only sign that the mountain was still populated were the two monks who sat in meditation a few meters away from the teleporter. They woke up from Zac's arrival, and he nodded at them before he glanced in the direction of the core of the Dead Zone.

It felt like there was an unseen war taking place as a thick wall of miasma rose into the skies a few kilometers away. The line of demarcation was much clearer now compared to before, making Zac believe the Undead might have erected some unholy beacons outside to combat the purification of the runes on the mountain.

The two young monks stepped forward and told Zac that the Abbot was waiting in his courtyard and directed him toward the summit. Zac followed in tow, ascending the same set of stairs as the last time. This time the pressure was almost negligible, perhaps since Zac had a naturally stronger grasp of his Dao.

They soon reached the peak and Zac truly started to worry when he saw that the temple buildings were devoid of monks as well. A sense of wrongness crept into Zac's heart as he looked around, trying to figure out just what was going on.

"Where is everyone?" Zac asked the monks, who looked slightly troubled. "Did the undead attack?"

"The Abbot will explain everything," one of the two said. "But our disciple brothers are fine."

Zac slowly nodded, as he kept walking toward the small courtyard in the back of the mountain. But he stopped in his tracks the moment he reached the square in front of Abbot Everlasting Peace's home.

Thousands of monks sat silently with closed eyes, not one of them moving a muscle. They were so still that Zac almost would have thought them statues if it wasn't for the terrifying amount of Cosmic Energy that swirled around them, infusing some enormous newly added runes on the ground.

The runes were Sanskrit just as the ones on the mountain walls, but the power they emitted was far beyond anything he sensed from those covering the mountain. Zac still couldn't read the script, but he guessed it was some Buddhist Sutra functioning as an Array.

Cosmic Energy wasn't the only thing that the air was ripe with. Mysterious energy that made the fractal of [Mental Fortress] tingle was also everywhere. It was as though the monks had combined not only their energy but also their Dao for some unknown reason.

Zac's heartbeat sped up from feeling the power that was contained in the runes as he walked toward the Abbot's courtyard. Was the monastery planning to launch some massive strike at the undead, and needed his help to stabilize the situation?

Various possibilities ran through Zac's head as he pushed open the large doors to find the old monk from last time standing inside. It was the old man who had accompanied him up the stairs and given him some pointers, but he had a complicated expression when he saw Zac enter.

At first he smiled and bowed, and it seemed as though he was about to utter a greeting. But he suddenly looked down again, and if Zac didn't know better he would have thought that he saw shame on the old man's face.

Instead, the old man indicated for Zac to head further in, and Zac complied with some confusion in his heart. His eyes immediately turned to the pond, but to his surprise the huge lotus was gone. He quickly looked around and saw Abbot Everlasting Peace sit on a prayer mat under an old tree on the other side of the pond with a pot of tea by his side.

Zac flashed over to the Abbot and breathed out in relief when he saw that he was fine. The horrifying wound in his chest was gone, and the old man was brimming with vitality even though he still looked quite old.

"This penniless monk is happy to see that benefactor could arrive in time," the old man said with a kindly smile as he indicated for Zac to sit down.

"It is good to see you as well," Zac said, accepting the cup of tea the Abbot poured him.

"This is a wild tea that grew on our sister mountain before the world changed," Everlasting Peace said as he took a small sip with contentment in his eyes. "It was gifted to this penniless monk by a Daoist who lived in seclusion there. He was a great scholar, but this one fears he fell during the Tutorial."

Zac wasn't sure what the old man was getting at, so he simply sipped the tea as while silently listening. It was unlike any tea that Zac had ever drunk before, with a heavy and bitter taste. It was still quite delicious, but Zac was mostly surprised by the fact that there was a smidgeon of Cosmic Energy in the tea.

It wasn't anywhere near what any true spiritual tea would contain, and it was impossible to gain any strength from it. But it was still pretty shocking considering it was something that came from the old Earth, and perhaps it was an indication that magic might actually have existed even before the integration.

"These cups were gifted our mountain three hundred years ago by the local lord. He came to pray to Buddha for a son after years of being unable to conceive a child. When his wish came true he returned with ten chests of gold and these cups that were given to him by a great scholar from the capital," the Abbot continued.

"This monastery has lived side by side with the secular world for over a thousand years, spreading the word of Buddha, and sowing seeds of karma. This poor monk hopes that we have left the world a better place than before. But just as day inevitably gives way to night, so must Karma eventually be severed."

"Severed?" Zac repeated with a frown. "What's going on? Are the undead mounting an attack?"

"Benefactor needs not to worry. This penniless monk is simply rambling, remembering a lost era. The Yin Creatures are of no threat to us," The abbot said as he finished his cup of tea and stood up. "This penniless monk invited benefactor to witness."

"Witness what?" Zac said, his confusion only growing as he drank the last of the tea and followed the old man who was walking toward the exit.

The old monk had waited while the two conversed, and he silently opened the gates to let Zac and the abbot exit. The two stopped right outside the gates, and for the first time since Zac arrived, he saw the monks open their eyes.

"Amithaba, it is time," the Abbot said with a sad smile as he looked at the sea of monks.

No one said a word, but power immediately surged from the thousands of people and a pillar of light suddenly shot into the sky from the runes on the ground. It almost looked like the light of an incursion, but enormous lines Sanskrit floated in concentric circles around it.

Zac couldn't believe what he was seeing. The pillar was unlike anything he had witnessed before. Just what had these monks accomplished? It was as though they had invented their very own way of utilizing Cosmic Energy, turning it into something that Zac could only call Buddhist Energy. It gave off a holy and stable feeling, but it was clearly different from the energy of Sui or his Divine Crystals.

A golden halo suddenly erupted with boundless life force behind Abbot Everlasting Peace, and Zac actually had to take a step back with wide eyes. The power that the abbot emitted was almost at the

same level as Inevitability, though it was completely different. It was soft and elusive, and it felt as though it contained endless mysteries.

Oddly enough the power that the old monk emitted wasn't didn't cause danger sense to go off in the slightest. Zac could usually feel at least something unless the disparity between himself and the other party was too great. Did the Abbot's Karmic powers obscure his perception awarded from his high Luck?

His thoughts suddenly were interrupted as a silver cloud appeared inside the pillar as though it had been teleported. One moment the pillar was empty, and the next the cloud was there as it had always been present.

Zac's heart immediately started to beat wildly as he realized that there was someone inside the cloud. He couldn't sense the slightest ripple of energy, but Zac could barely discern the shape of a person slightly moving inside. Worse yet was that Zac's instincts screamed at him that whoever was summoned was far beyond what he could handle.

The shocking turn of events made Zac unsure what to believe even to the point that he took out [Verun's Bite] to get ready for a desperate struggle. His confusion only grew when the old abbot suddenly got down on his knees and bowed down until his forehead touched the ground toward the silver cloud.

"Disciple greets master."