

The Fall 595

Chapter 595: Karma and Time

"No, I swear I'm not lying!" Leviala exclaimed with a pale face. "You're not the first one to make that deduction. Our clan was constantly harassed because a lot of forces believed us to manipulate Karma for our profit. I only reacted strongly because our clan suffered a lot of harassment because of this."

"If not Karma, then what?" Zac asked.

"You have probably realized that my clan has an eye-based bloodline after seeing me," Leviala eventually said. "That's why we were caught and brought here."

"Really? Just because of that?" Zac asked, skepticism written all over his face. "There's no way the Tsarun clan would capture you because of that."

It wasn't without reason Zac had that sort of reaction. He had learned a thing or two about bloodlines from gathering missives by now, and he wasn't completely clueless any longer. The most common types of bloodlines were combat-oriented, with the second most common being affinity-related, either boosting cultivation speed or Skill Control.

Ocular Bloodlines were a lot rarer than those types, but not to the point that it was exceedingly rare. But more importantly, they were generally not seen as too useful since they mainly focused on scouting or helping with things like inscriptions and crafting.

There was no way that the power-hungry Tsarun-clan would waste so much effort on something useless though. Those wolves had gained a pretty decent boost to their combat strength when their bloodlines awakened, surpassing the general estimates of common bloodlines. There had to be something special about Clan Cartava to warrant their capture.

"Our clan has nothing to do with Karma, really. Our bloodlines provide us with scouting abilities and some suppression," Leviala repeated once more.

"Then why did that guy say that you're the key to immortality?" Zac asked with a frown, feeling he was being taken for a ride.

Zac's gut told him that the werewolf threw out that last line with his dying breath to cause trouble, but that didn't mean that he was lying. These werewolves had fought in the Outer Ring against the humans, and now they had managed to somehow capture one of them. The fact that the werewolves worked so hard against the humans rather than trying to escape meant they possessed something even more valuable than freedom.

Immortality was one such thing. Even a pig would become an overlord given enough time, so it was definitely an alluring concept for most cultivators. Perhaps the werewolf believed Zac would feel the same and torture the girl for her secrets. However, Zac wasn't personally all that interested in the prospect of immortality.

He grew up expecting to live around 80 years, so his current lifespan approaching the thousands was already shocking enough. Who would want to walk the universe until the end of time? It sounded torturous more than anything. The girl seemed reluctant to say anything more though as she looked

around back and forth. Zac had an idea of what she was worried about, and he took out and activated an Isolation Array.

"No one can hear us now," Zac said. "I normally wouldn't pressure someone like this, but you're simply acting too suspiciously. I can't have anything going wrong in this place. Billions of lives depend on it."

"...Fine," Leviala eventually sighed. "You have to swear on your path of cultivation to not divulge what I'm about to say, and not to experiment on me or my clansmen."

"I swear to not divulge anything as long as you don't move against me or my force," Zac nodded. "And I would never experiment on people."

Leviala looked at Zac for a while longer, before she eventually nodded.

"Our bloodline really isn't anything more than a decent ocular heritage. But that wasn't always the case. Our founding ancestor's eyes were different from ours. They contained the power of time itself. Not only did he live five times longer than a normal cultivator at his stage, but he was able to glimpse into both the past and present to some degree," Leviala said. "His children never inherited his gift though, but the ancestor's actions started the rumors about us being a Karmic Clan."

"Eventually, the rumors died down though and our lives started to return to normal. However, the Tsarun Clan found out about the true nature of our founding ancestor's eyes through a traitor. They wanted that power of time for themselves. I don't know why, but I think it was for the same reason as the Lunar Tribe. They want to extract the power in our eyes to increase their longevity," Leviala said.

"And you have the same types of eyes as your ancestor," Zac deduced before he looked at her with exasperation. "All that talk, and it's still related to Karma after all?"

"You seem to have a flawed understanding of the Dao of Karma. Karma and Divination are completely separate from the Dao of Time. Karma is an understanding of the interconnectedness of everything in the universe. It's understanding causality, and in some cases deliberately influencing the future by taking some seemingly inscrutable actions," Leviala explained.

"They are unable to see the whole picture as normal cultivators though, so they connect with the omnipresent Heavens for a short moment to borrow its omniscience, all the karmic ties and relations. But ultimately, they are still not actually peering into the future or the past," she continued.

"Furthermore, Karma is just one type of Divination. There's also the Numerology of the Dao of Order, and some oracles even enter contracts with strange beings of other dimensions who can show them glimpses of the unknown. I'm sure there are even more types out there."

"So they aren't actually able to see the future. But you are?" Zac said with a frown.

Timeline altering seemed extremely overpowered, especially for someone in the E-Grade. Getting your soul wounded and a bleeding nose could barely be considered a backlash for something so heaven-defying. The brand on her eye looked a lot more worrisome, but how could that compare to altering the past?

"No. I can just glimpse fragmented images, and generally just the from past. When I chose a direction before I looked into the past and saw werewolves coming from this corridor," Leviala explained. "But

during your battle, I felt a sudden urge to peek into the future, and I saw a hand holding a restraint module behind you. I knew that we both would be in trouble if that really happened, so I called out.

“As you saw, looking into the future is a lot more dangerous than the past, because even just looking will invariably change the future. Besides, I can only see a short image, but there’s no guarantee that I would understand what I saw. This time I was lucky since I knew that you getting sealed would be bad for me, but the risk of receiving the backlash and gaining nothing in return is high,” Leviala said. “The backlash is also extremely harsh, every usage comes with a permanent cost.”

Zac slowly nodded. He couldn’t pinpoint what, but he felt that there was something odd with her description of the events. Perhaps it was the ‘sudden urge’ to peek into the future that was the most suspect. Then again, he often got those sorts of urges thanks to his high Luck, and perhaps she had a similar ability.

“So you got a glimpse of a bad future, and warned me to prevent it? Can everyone in your clan do this?” Zac asked.

“No,” Leviala said. “Just a select few.”

“Thank you for letting me know. And don’t worry, I have no interest in your time eyes,” Zac said as he picked up the isolation disk. “I don’t want to be hunted down by the old monsters in the sector for holding a key to increased longevity.”

Leviala could only weakly smile in response, and the two set out a few minutes later after there was no sign of the Void Creature returning. Zac wasn’t joking when he said that he would keep the secret to himself. Part of it was the reason he just said. He didn’t want to live a life where he was hunted by powerful factions, like Yrial or the Eveningtide Asura.

But part of it was definitely because of her situation. She hadn’t said it outright, but warning him had definitely come at a cost. He had noticed that Leviala had repeatedly reached for her branded eye as they traveled along the corridors, and he guessed that the curse was a direct result of peering into the future.

After all, if meddling with the strings of Karma came at a sharp price, then the same would probably hold for meddling with time. The System or the real Heavens protected the fundamental rules of the universe it seemed. Otherwise things would turn extremely chaotic with people jumping back and forth through timelines as they pleased.

The minutes turned into two hours as they progressed further and further from their starting position, though they had to backtrack a few times after encountering completely crumbled sections of the corridors. Perennial spatial storms were swirling about in these places, making it completely impossible to pass through.

But finally, there was a change as they heard a loud argument in the distance. They had moved in complete silence after the first 30 minutes out of fear of alerting the sensitive werewolves, with Leviala only giving directions with her hands. Two gruff voices echoed through the corridors, making the two freeze in position. Zac once more took out the isolation array, hoping that the energy fluctuations wouldn’t alert anyone.

The two listened for a bit, and it quickly became apparent it was an argument between two squad leaders. One of them wanted to set out immediately since he believed something had gone wrong. The other wanted to wait for Hevastes as he carried a lot of the Base Power required to power the safe bubbles placed in the Wasteland.

They couldn't hear everything though, and the voices stopped after a minute.

"It should be just up ahead," Zac said with a low voice. "Stay here."

"You'll come pick me up, right?" Leviala said with worry. "I don't think I can get back alone. I should tell you; I hold some weight in my clan, things will get a lot easier for you if you have me assisting you from the inside. I doubt my people would be ready to head for the depths of this place rather than the exit if my grandpa doesn't tell them to."

"Of course, I'll help you," Zac assured her as silvery tufts of hair started to grow from his face.

A blinding agony spread through Zac's body the next moment as he activated [Million Faces] for the first time. The fit with his pathways wasn't any better with the upgraded skill, which meant that every minor adjustment was accompanied by the feeling of his bones being crushed and reformed. And Zac wasn't planning on a minor adjustment.

His face elongated while his body grew a few decimeters as he donned a hunched-over posture with his arms hanging low. Sharp claws grew out from his hands and he felt his teeth growing sharp as well.

"How do I look?" Zac grunted a minute later, though he had some problems forming words properly with a canine snout.

"Just what are you? Can you turn into anything?" Leviala whispered in shock.

"It's a transformation skill," Zac snorted. "Do I look like a werewolf?"

"Honestly, you look like a failed miscreation," Leviala said, and she clearly had problems looking in his direction.

Zac sighed when he saw her disgusted face, and a wave of disgust hit him as well when he took out a mirror. The only way he would be mistaken for a werewolf was if the werewolf not only suffered from a severe case of mange but also a series of birth defects.

The extent he could change his body was a lot greater with his new skill, but turning into a werewolf was clearly overreaching. But he still wanted to get a small advantage this way. Leviala believed that the Relay Station was in what she called a chokepoint chamber, a large warehouse with one entrance and one exit.

It would be the only path to get to the other side, and it was easily defended. Most settlements in the Mystic Realm were built in these kinds of chambers, or series of such warehouses, and sometimes they could even control the barriers leading in and out. Leviala guessed that they wouldn't have too great a control of the base this far from their real domain, but she couldn't be sure.

The Lunar Clan had already provided her with plenty of surprises.

He thought for a second before he had an idea to improve the disguise. He took out a couple of bandages next and covered over half his face and hands, with the uneven tufts of silver hair sticking out between. He took out the dead werewolf leader next and pushed his bisected body against the bandages, drenching them with blood.

Leviala seemed ready to vomit at the macabre display, but Zac had long turned numb to these kinds of grotesque actions. What did it matter if he got a little bloodied if he could complete his quest and save his people? Next, he put on a spare set of the clothes he found in Hevastes' Cosmos Sack, finishing the makeshift transformation.

"What about now?" Zac said as he spun around.

"I guess you can pass as Hevastes from a distance, but you won't be able to infiltrate them this way," Leviala said.

"That's fine, I just need to get through the door," Zac muttered.

"You know, Hevastes and the others were weakened after they killed my guard, but I don't think the other squads are in that bad a shape. And there might be quite a few of them," she exhorted. "You might not--"

"I have to do this," Zac said as he stood up and cracked his neck. "Wait here, we'll be back in a few minutes."

Zac started making his way toward the source of the argument earlier, and he took on a shuffling walk to make it look like he was wounded. He wanted to create the illusion of Hevastes returning alone in defeat after failing his mission. He soon enough reached a proper arch that was blocked with a familiar red barrier.

"Lord Hevastes, is that you?" a hesitant voice emerged from the other side as a werewolf stepped forward, looking at Zac's appearance with shock.

"Get the fuck out of the way," Zac growled, trying to make his voice mimic the gruff timbre of the werewolf leader.

A surge of relief hit Zac a second later as the barrier flickered out, and Zac wasted no time.

"Wh--" the wolf said with wide eyes, but he didn't get any further before Zac's hand snapped forward, gripping the werewolf by the throat and cracking his neck.

A surge of Cosmic Energy confirmed the kill, and [Verun's Bite] appeared in his hand as he started to transform back to normal.

"We're under attack!" another guard screamed just before Zac managed to end his life as well.

Zac had never expected to enter the open space unnoticed with his wretched disguise. Cosmic Energy churned through his body as he was primed for an all-out assault.