

Oracle 553

Chapter 553 - What The Heck?

Kyle looked at the resealed rift and the Undead army behind them and gave Will a sardonic look. 'Do you see any other options?'

Jake also frowned as he saw that they were surrounded on all sides. It was one thing not to be able to run away, but these High-Rank Evolvers probably weren't going to let them explore the dungeon on their own either.

Anyhow, what on earth was a Dungeon Digestor? Was it an actual living thing or just some place built by sentient Digestors?

[Now that we're stuck here, the Oracle System's censorship seems to have been partially lifted.] Xi spoke demurely, confirming Grash's statement. [A Dungeon Digestor is a real living thing. It is a Digestor of Rank 12 or above. With an exceptional and innate grasp of the Aether and its laws, they are able to use their knowledge and the Dream Aether's framework to spawn Digestors of their choosing in their territory.]

'Was it worth censoring such a predictable secret?' Jake slurred at the Oracle as he usually did to vent his frustration.

[... Probably not.]

What could Xi possibly answer to that? Since she had no control over this censorship, she could only accept it, no matter how annoying it was. As she obediently endured her master's ranting, she searched her memories for any useful data and gasped in surprise when she found something against all odds.

[Ah!]

Xi?" Jake momentarily forgot to grouch as he registered her surprise. It was rare for his Oracle AI to react in such a cute way.

Somewhat mortified by her unbecoming reaction, she quickly explained,

[I think I know what these high-ranked Evolvers are up to by keeping us here.] Feeling Jake's impatience, she refrained from prolonging the suspense. [The mountain we're in now and everything within it can be considered part of the Dungeon Digestor. In addition to being under its control, our every move is tracked. As long as we walk on these rocks and breathe this air, it will know exactly where we are. But the Dungeon itself is not all that valuable. The most important part remains the Nexus, where the soul and memories of this Digestor are housed. As long as this organ exists, the Dungeon Digestor will always be able to re-establish a dungeon elsewhere even if it is destroyed. You can think of it as its brain.]

Jake was about to follow up with several more questions when something happened in the cave that caught his attention. The survivors of the various factions were huddled together in this cave, but it was still possible to tell at a glance which factions were the most threatening.

Besides the presence of a real army and the complete absence of refugees, their leaders, these high-ranked Evolvers had Aether signatures and auras that were hard to ignore. The old necromancer was one of them and he had already monopolized the entrance to one of the many tunnels.

His hundred or so golden-armored warriors had already joined him and were now standing in tight formation behind him. The Undead army trailing behind Jake and his group then broke off to join their master and the refugees hurriedly stepped aside to let their dead comrades pass.

It went without saying that these refugees who had lost several of their friends in the previous battle did not hold the necromancer in their hearts. Especially when their friends' and family's corpses were now serving a shady old man with questionable morals.

The other high-rank Evolvers and their factions did not look kindly on the necromancer's army either. The grim and supercilious looks they were shooting at him left no doubt as to where they stood.

"Nelekai, how bold of you to use these valiant warriors' souls to expand your army! Don't tell me you intend to use their deaths to claim the Nexus?"

The one who had just shouted out in a thunderous and provocative manner was precisely the high-rank Evolver who had spoken back to him rudely a few moments earlier.

This man with long spiky black hair and blue eyes had a nasty temper and was easily provoked. His irises housing two golden star-shaped pupils and his long aquamarine sword half-sheathed which he was rhythmically stroking attracted the eye. He wore the loose, dark clothing of a martial artist, as well as a long overcoat with long sleeves to hide his hand movements. To round out this depiction, a savage feistiness seemed to surround him, so honed that the crowd had the uncanny inkling that they would be torn to shreds if they deigned to get any closer.

With his healthy tan, his lean muscles, his sharp jaw and his refined features, this young man couldn't be called a pretty boy, but he should have enjoyed a decent success with the ladies. Too bad, that his bone-chilling and spooky aura was too ingrained in his character to allow him to get along with anyone.

Along with the veiled young woman whose entire body was draped in a thick dark cloth leaving her curves indistinguishable, they were the only two high-rank Evolvers without companions.

Naturally, upon being slandered squarely by this greenhorn, the one called Nelekai was not happy. He had not braved all these dangers and reached the point where he was to allow himself to be discredited by a lowlife, albeit of the same status as himself.

"This old man never asked for anyone's opinion to have his way." The necromancer declared loudly before adding with a sneer, "And so what if I do use these cannonfodders to replenish my troops? Whether I use them or not, they're destined to die here. Don't tell me you don't know what's going on in this place?"

The starry-eyed young man's cheek muscles twitched as he took in this counter-argument brimming with contempt. A clear note chimed in the cave and before anyone could react, the warrior had already crossed the distance separating him from the necromancer, his aquamarine blade already drawn a few inches away from his throat.

Taken aback by such a stunning strike, the old man's eyes widened in disbelief, but his serene face revealed no fear. Just before impact, a bony growth, coupled with a grayish energy force field intercepted the blade, halting its progress.

This was no mere stroke, and the sharp energy enveloping the blade ricocheted against these two obstructions without harming them. This prodigiously sharp energy was then deflected to the sides and two startled groans rang out a few feet from the skilled swordsman, as a huge trench ripped open the ground at their former position.

The two hooded figures who were about to ambush him retreated immediately after, even faster than they had been ambushed. As for the 100 golden-armored warriors serving the necromancer, they had no time to react and seven of them were instantly cut into dozens of pieces by the remnants of this sharp energy.

BANG!

The shockwave following the initial impact between the sword and this bony growth with a force field was finally heard and the closest refugees were blown to the other end of the cave before crashing helplessly against the walls. Surprisingly, none of them were severely injured and it was difficult to determine if this was a coincidence or an act of benevolence from the aggressive swordsman.

"Lost Divinities?" The starry-eyed young man murmured darkly as he recognized the two hooded attackers. "What are they doing here?"

"Oh? You recognize them?" The necromancer croaked hoarsely. "You don't have to know why they're here! Now, die for this old man!"

A monstrous Death Energy blast erupted forth from his body, enveloping his opponent, his own troops as well as the other survivors who had unfortunately weathered the previous shockwave. If this was initially a source of pride, they now deeply regretted their tenacity. They would have been better off letting the wind blow them away with the others.

In a split second, their skin withered and their complexion paled. Their joints became sore, their muscles shriveled, and they felt their vision blurred and their hearing dulled. Even with their Evolver vitality, the victims affected by this rotting energy could barely slow the process down.

Within ten seconds, the weaker ones were transformed into desiccated mummies and their Death Mark activated, resurrecting them to join the rest of the Undead army.

The remaining tough guys managed to shake off the invasive energy using various techniques or their abundant vitality and constitution, but a few more wrinkles now marred their faces, showing that they had not escaped unscathed.

Some of these high-ranked Evolvers obviously had good bloodlines, as these wrinkles were slowly fading, but for the others it was a tragedy that they would remember and that would foster the universal hatred that most worlds had for necromancers and other degenerative magics.

The main one concerned, the swordsman, who had been washed by this Death Energy at close range, kept a straight face. His skin had quickly withered, but his killing intent had only intensified in response. When his star-shaped pupils lit up, projecting their holy light, it was the necromancer's skin instead that began to corrode.

"Aaarrgh!"

The current of Death Energy was cut off and a cataclysmic explosion caused by the collision between the two energies pulled the two opponents apart. The bone armor and its force field shattered as the necromancer used the counter force of the explosion to rocket himself into the tunnel he had been standing at before.

The golden-armored warriors under his command scurried after him while the Undead army dispersed in small regiments into the other passages before anyone was in position to intercept them.

Half-kneeling in the opposite direction, the starry-eyed swordsman wiped the blood from his forehead with astonishment before his killing intent burst forth again. With superhuman speed, he sheathed his sword and dashed into the same tunnel where the necromancer had just vanished.

Almost simultaneously, dozens of hooded figures barely slower jumped out of the crowd and likewise disappeared into the same tunnel, chasing the swordsman.

All the while, Jake and the other refugees stood transfixed by this series of twists and turns, unable to comprehend what the heck they had just witnessed.