

Oracle 555

Chapter 555 - Choose Wisely

Still, their latest power-ups to him and his companions had greatly increased his optimism for the upcoming venture.

Sticking with Bhuzkoc and the nearly one hundred Fourth-Ordeal Evolvers under his command would have been suicide a week earlier, but now he at least had the confidence that he could escape safely if the unexpected happened.

The only uncontrollable variable was the Black Orc, but he didn't seem to have much interest in their quarrel. In fact, the servile and sycophantic attitude of Bhuzkoc and the other Evolvers in his faction suggested that they absolutely needed him and not the other way around.

The mystery of why such a high-ranked Evolver would choose to travel with this group was left unanswered, however, and that was the most concerning. If this were an exception, Jake might have seen it as an eccentricity on the part of the Black Orc, but after the most recent events he had grown despondent on the matter.

None of these high-rank Evolvers were good people. The necromancer had clearly used the refugees' deaths to replenish his army, while the other Evolvers of comparable might had only lifted a finger at the last moment.

If they had lent a hand from the beginning, the flood of rampaging beasts could have been contained immediately and most of the casualties averted.

Jake wasn't presuming to understand the intentions of these powerhouses either. Some of them had their own factions, but most were solitary.

Yet now, after the hasty departure of Nelekai, the swordsman and his hooded pursuers from Lost Divinities, the atmosphere in the cave had begun to change. The remaining high-rank players had decided to take action.

Those who had their own subordinates ignored the other factions and wordlessly chose one of the tunnels before marching inside in a disciplined manner. Those who were solitary also disregarded the rest of the crowd and flew towards the gallery of their choice at a terrifying speed.

Among them was a huge Nosk.

Few saw it before it vanished into a tunnel, but Jake caught a glimpse of one of its long, luminous hair dendrites bobbing up in the air like a living snake, and after a blinding flash the entrance to that gallery was sealed in ice.

Many gasped, seized by a cold shudder of fear at this display of raw power and Jake was no exception.

He and his comrades were familiar with this alien species. Warmongering and hard-headed, these aliens were a proud race that only realized their potential through warfare. Defeating valiant opponents was their reason for being and their greatest pride. To die in battle by the blade of their enemies was also a supreme honor.

Most Nosks were fearless, their ruthlessness matched only by their unwavering determination. Although their bodies were freakishly strong and they could perform all sorts of feats by channeling the energy stored in their dendrites, these aliens did have one crippling weakness:

Cold.

And this Nosk had just used one of his dendrites to perform an ice spell. Just the implications of that notion were bone-chilling.

This Nosk, was a Nosk with no weaknesses.

In addition to the Nosk, three other Evolvers and several huge solitary beasts also monopolized one of the corridors, having no intention of cooperating with anyone.

One of these creatures was just nightmarish and looked even more evil than Digestors. Jake didn't dare scan it, but Xi informed him that whatever its original species may have been, this beast had now all the physical characteristics of a Taotie, a famous monster from Chinese mythology known for its boundless gluttony.

Even in this lesser form, it was a powerful Grade 9 Bloodline verging on Grade 10. Borrowing traits from dragons and tigers, this ferocious-looking quadrupedal horned monster had multiple bulging yellow eyes with thick eyebrows and no lower jaw. Its fur was emerald green and its multiple long horns were pure gold. If not for its length of over 70 meters and the fact that its horns and fangs dwarfed Grash's greatsword by several feet, they might have considered the creature "aesthetically interesting."

As the huge monster set into motion, the earth quaked with each of its heavy footsteps and a few overly slow refugees were inadvertently crushed. One of the surviving rampaging beasts was also in its path, and Jake recognized the white-furred triceratops species that had impaled it earlier.

Pointlessly cocky, the animal refused to move aside and weakly snorted in a futile attempt at intimidation.

CHOMP! Gulp.

Neither Jake nor any of the Fourth-Ordeal Evolvers had time to see the action. Like the others, he heard a deafening sound of chewing and breaking bones, followed by an audible swallow. Where the woolly triceratops was, there was nothing. Not even a drop of blood or a tuft of fur.

Jake and the other Evolvers paled as they witnessed this silent death and those who were still a little too close to the Taotie hurried away. Sneaking a peek at the Black Orc, he noticed that he also sported an ugly face and he couldn't help but gloat.

At least this Black Orc wasn't as terrifying as this Taotie and it gave him a rough sense of where these high-rank Evolvers stood in relation to each other.

From what he had seen in the last few minutes, in pure physical power, the Taotie was first, and the swordsman second. It was hard to say who would prevail in a fight to the death. The monster was like a mountain, but the warrior with the starry pupils seemed far from having shown everything.

In comparison, the necromancer was clearly inferior. From their confrontation, his physical strength and agility was barely above Jake's. Without his necromancy and Death Magic, even a Fourth-Ordeal Evolver could take him on.

After the Taotie and the other lone powerhouses left, only the Black Orc, the veiled young woman and three other behemoths remained. The last four Evolvers did not belong to any group and their intentions were obvious.

They had stayed to recruit new allies.

The Black Orc already had his own party, but he was not averse to expanding his army. Beholding the petite and humble appearance of the veiled woman whose curves were wrapped in her long cloak, his manhood stood at attention, but he knew only too well what kind of viper he was dealing with.

A young woman walking alone in the wilderness? If that wasn't recklessness, then she obviously had the skills to ensure her own safety. Her silence and ostensible prudishness was merely a sham designed to bring misery to countless men.

The Black Orc snorted as he saw her standing stiffly in the same spot, but he became confused when she continued to remain silent. If she didn't breathe a word, how did she intend to recruit anyone?

In contrast, the three behemoths were far more proactive.

The first one, a huge two-hundred-meter-long whale, was levitating in the air a few feet off the ground, enveloped in a halo of bluish light. The psionic energy capable of moving its enormous mass was a testament to its vast spiritual power. A high-pitched whale-like wail escaped from its gigantic mouth, and all received the same telepathic message simultaneously.

"I know that many of you are feeling overwhelmed and lost by all the things that are happening around you." That clear, melodious voice echoed in all of their minds, warming their hearts and ruining the intentions of the other two behemoths.

"I won't lie to you, there are forces at work to prevent the Oracle Overseer and his Guardians from interfering here, but it is only a temporary interference. Eventually they will know what is going on here and come to our rescue very soon. The rescue may come in a few hours or days, but it will come. In other words, if you don't want to take any risks, you can choose to stay in this cave and wait for rescue. Based on my knowledge, as long as you stay wisely inside the Dungeon Digestor, the horde outside will never attack you."

Many of the refugees and lower-ranked Evolvers cheered ecstatically at the news that they no longer had to risk their lives. The guaranteed coming of help on short notice was like the first rays of sunshine on their faces after an endless stormy night.

In his own group, Will was particularly tempted, but he sighed ruefully when he saw the determined expressions on Kyle and Jake's faces. Few refugees seemed to share his opinion. As such, it would seem that Jake's charisma was not inferior to his own. His infectious foolhardiness was already beginning to alter the hearts of these once cowardly and indecisive new members.

'I'd better prepare for the inevitable...' Will muttered inwardly as he walked toward a group of barely pacified creatures.

It was time to put his eloquence to the test.

While most of the refugees were thinking of staying here and waiting for help, the huge whale continued his speech and then dropped a bombshell that made them change their minds abruptly.

"For those of you who intend to explore this place, be aware that a Dungeon Digester abounds with treasures. With the Oracle System's censorship now partially lifted, let me explain the basics. A Dungeon Digester is neither a building, nor a cave, nor a fortress. As its name suggests, it is a Digester. A living being. To be even more specific, it is a Digester of Rank 12 or higher."

Seeing the faces of his audience glaze over in shock, the whale hastened to clarify,

"Don't worry, this Digester is different from the other types and has little or no combat potential. For reasons unknown to me, these Digester Dungeons are actually quite generous and are a godsend for advanced Evolvers like myself and even more so for inferior Evolvers like you.

"I can promise you one thing. If you explore this dungeon with me for just a few minutes, 100% of you will give up the plan to wait here for rescue. On the other hand, if you decide to follow me, I must sadly report that most of you will not make it out alive.

"Choose wisely. Guaranteed power and high risk or safety and stagnation?"