

Oracle 573

Chapter 573 - And You?

A catastrophe had just been averted.

Will, who had been silently watching their argument, relaxed at last as he realized that the worst conclusion had been avoided. These Nawai warriors were no good guys, but for the time being at least, their intentions were not hostile.

Cooperation was possible.

Fumdalf already had a high opinion of him and his character and intentions were still hard to pin down. He was smart though and could see the big picture. Will much preferred to collaborate and negotiate with rational villain than braindead saints. As long as their interests were aligned, working together was a viable option.

Isskhar was a veteran warrior approaching his twilight years. His braided turquoise mane was slowly turning gray and had lost its fluorescence. At two meters sixty and with his muscular build, this Nawai male was as intimidating and domineering as his peers, taller than most even, but his build was frailer than in his heyday. If it weren't for his recent power-ups and the advent of Aether, his physical condition would surely have resembled that of Ingranus before Jake accepted him into his faction.

His temperament seemed calm and clear-headed, but Isskhar was undoubtedly a traditional Nawai warrior. He was an aggressive, libidinous, violent and belligerent man who definitely had a sexist and backward view of women.

It was fortunate that Svava and the two sisters were not there. Will, on the other hand, thought he could handle this kind of individual who was a slave to his instincts and preconceptions.

"You heard us? Are you with us or not?" Fumdalf called out, as he swung his head in his direction.

"I'm in no position to refuse."

"Clever lad." The handsome mage laughed goodheartedly.

"Although, you've convinced me, I don't want to hang around with these useless runts." Isskharr snarled as he scowled at the small human only reaching his pecs.

"If I hadn't stopped you, you'd have walked out of here like a good doggie after hearing a single word out of his mouth." Fumdalf squinted his eyes at him in warning. "If you want to survive here, give up your haughtiness."

Against all odds, Isskhar nodded absent-mindedly,

"You're right. I need to change my mindset. A good brain is more useful than I thought."

The mage patted his shoulder with a knowing smile. "I'm glad you got it so quickly."

If not for the obvious note of sarcasm, this could have been a compliment. Fortunately, Isskhar's toothy grin told them he didn't get the underlying meaning.

"Grrr!"

Will gasped in fright as he heard something growl at his feet, but the two remaining Nawai warriors reacted stoically, as if they knew it was going to happen.

"Your mace." Fumdalf uttered as he held out his hand to the veteran warrior.

"Catch it."

Fumdalf grabbed the mace on the fly, then used it to nonchalantly smash down the head of the deceased Nawai who was just starting to wake up under the Death Mark's curse. The undead who was about to come back to life stopped squirming, becoming silent again as a dead man was meant to be.

After that, a fragile cooperation between Will and the two Fourth-Ordeal Evolvers was established. They set off toward one of the infrastructures in the distance, keeping a careful distance between them.

Will, in particular, abandoned the previous formation, preferring to keep Chimera and Vulture at his side. He also forced Cobra to crawl on its own. They would lose some speed waiting for it, but the previous incident had made him painfully aware that keeping a snake too close was not really an asset against Fumdalf.

At first they stayed pretty guarded against the other group, but after a few successful ambushes they started to let loose a bit.

Will also grew more confident in his newfound powers. Because these goblins had some semblance of intelligence, they could understand what he was saying and therefore his Charisma Aether and other Beguiling Spells were effective.

"Stretch your neck and stay still!" The businessman shouted for the umpteenth time at a group of goblins charging at him.

The goblins suddenly stopped their frantic charge, bowing low and offering their defenseless necks for food. Will slowly walked over to them, then slit their throats one by one with a long dagger. Feeling his Aether and Soul Stats rise, a slight smirk graced his lips.

His Strength, Agility and Constitution Aether stats which were already at 1000 points had only gained a point or two, but his Vitality, Intelligence, Perception and Extrasensory Perception had finally broken through the insurmountable 100 point threshold.

Because these stats were so far behind, their progress was brisk. His Aether Vitality had already reached 150 points, his Intelligence 125, his Perception 112 and his Extrasensory Perception 106. His Spirit Body had also just reached level 2.

Killing these weak goblin Digestors was more beneficial to Will and the other beasts than the two Nawai warriors. These Fourth-Ordeal Evolvers may have exterminated the majority of these monsters, including other more perilous threats like these fully-armored grey orcs, but their Aether stats were painfully stagnant compared to theirs.

Logically, if Fumdalf and Isskhar were their enemies, they would have no reason to let them close the gap. The difference between a Third and Fourth-Ordeal Evolver might seem large, but with the

mechanics of a Dungeon Digester it wouldn't take long for the two Nawaii to lose their dominant position.

This greatly changed the businessman's opinion of them. If they weren't completely stupid or reckless, it might be worth it to really get to know them. And to get to know people, there was nothing like a good chat.

And chatting with people was his specialty.

After a few initiatives, Will soon realized that while Isskhar was grumpy and not very talkative, Fumdalf was quite easy-going and actually quite a talker once he got going. He appeared to be enjoying their conversation and Will learned a great deal from his past experiences and anecdotes during his previous Ordeals.

The Shibai Tribe was both the native tribe where he, Bhuzkoc and Isskhar had grown up, but it was also the name of their Faction. Their First Faction Skill was an active skill named "Vitality Tithe" and could only be used by the Faction Leader. He could drain up to 10% of his members' Vitality and Life Force twice a month, then use this pool of Vitality Aether and Life Force as he pleased.

It was a tyrannical skill, which could however be used in the interest of the group in the right hands. Bhuzkoc, however, obviously could not be called a good leader. There was only one really important person in their faction and that was himself. The rest were just pawns on his road to success that he could discard at any time to achieve his goals.

After having broken the ice and exchanged their experiences for a few minutes, Will approached the sensitive subject and asked with a sincere curiosity,

"Why would you kill that comrade and leave Isskhar alive? I'm sure you could coax him out with your skills. Maybe forcing them to sign a Slave Contract is not out of the question."

Fumdalf swiped the air before him and a blade of bluish energy glowing like lightning shot out, slicing through a dozen trees and seven goblins hiding in the bushes, before explaining laconically,

"It was a spy from Shaktilar. I may be the only one with this kind of skill in the Shibai Tribe, but Shaktilar is an Ice mage himself. Even though the Shyrils are a bulky species and built for brawn, unlike the Nawaii males, they are cunning, patient and their civilization is far more advanced than ours. Which is to be totally frank, not that great of an achievement..."

Will could feel the sourness behind those words. It must have been terribly traumatic to believe that they were the best warriors in the world, only to realize that on the scale of the Mirror Universe they were nothing. Nawaii were just a joke at a cosmic scale.

All one had to do was stroll around Thelma to meet a bunch of stronger, smarter and wiser people. As these Nawaii Evolvers evolved and learned more about the reality of the world, they became painfully aware of their limitations. Some, like Fumdalf, were able to change and adapt, but the majority could not.

"I am the Shaman of the Shibai Tribe." Fumdalf clarified as he caught the perplexity on the human's face. "Our culture is primitive. Bhuzkoc has become the Chief because he was the strongest, and I'm the Shaman because I'm the smartest. Truth is I was just the best at talking shit. By chatting them up with

various superstitions, mystical incantations and a little drama, it's not hard to keep them on a leash. I think most of those still alive know that I was bullshitting them, but they don't hold it against me."

Making this admission, Fumdalf glanced tauntingly at Isskhar, whose ears were pricking up furiously in their direction, and then elaborated,

"Now I'm just trying to save whatever I can from my people. I already know that most will end up enslaved or wiped out by the Digestors or other more cunning and underhanded local tyrants. Too few have the flexibility of mind to adapt and change their ways. A woman could lead us, but thousands of years of subjugation and indoctrination have ruined their chances of breaking free of their chains. But still, it's my people. I will do everything in my power to save what's left of them."

Will remained silent for a long time after these poignant words. He could feel Fumdalf's steely will. Compared to him and his ambition to found the richest company in the Mirror Universe, he seemed somewhat immature. In the end, it was the mage Nawai who made him open up.

"And you? What's your goal? Don't tell me it's just to survive or to become rich and powerful.. Power and wealth are only means to an end."