

Oracle 574

Chapter 574 - Next Time We Fight Together

The question seemed harmless, but Will knew that Fumdalf was not done sizing him up. Depending on his answer, the good impression he had left might be shattered. After much deliberation, he opted for the truth. Something he hadn't told anyone else, not even Jake or Kyle. Maybe it was easier to say these things to an alien with vastly different social norms.

"On my planet before I got my Oracle Device my life had already turned to shit." Will shared, sullenly grimacing at the thought. "My company had just gone under, I was in debt, and I was going through a divorce. I trusted the wrong people and took risks I wasn't supposed to take. I was really at the end of my rope. I'm not the type to give up, but the naked truth was that I was almost happy when these aliens came and screwed up my world."

The businessman exhaled slowly as he relived those buried memories. Fumdalf was deadpan, but that was the way he wanted it. Will didn't want to be pitied, mocked or comforted. He just wanted to be listened to, to say what had been sitting on his heart for too long.

"When I got the bracelet, I knew I'd better prepare for the worst, but I used it first to get my revenge on life. In less than two months, I went from being in debt to a billionaire, before finally realizing that money was worthless. Then I learned that my ex-wife had been bitten by a stray dog and died shortly after of sepsis. Now I know in retrospect that it was most likely a Digestor. I didn't shed any tears, I was just too numb and disconnected from reality to care. The buildings and people so familiar around me were fading away one after the other and I was pathetically waiting for my turn. When I felt the day coming on, I went for a walk in the nearest mall and the next thing I knew I was on B842."

Will suddenly burst into laughter, but it was bitter and tainted with irony.

"Believe it or not, I've been pretty much happy ever since. I love this place. It's dangerous and you risk your life every minute, but I feel alive. This bracelet proved to me that I could succeed on Earth. When I learned about the vastness of the Mirror Universe, I gave my life a new meaning. Using this Oracle Device, I will create the most successful company in the Mirror Universe. It may sound absurd, but I now have friends I can trust. Even if I don't feel like doing anything, I will do my best to help them."

"But you're hiding things from them." Fumdalf retorted steadily. "Their presence is different from yours. The influence of Charisma Aether on your comrades is incomparable to yours. If I am not mistaken, you refused to share your Grade 2 Encoding. That sounds very selfish to me. You're also concealing your Aether Skills."

Will scratched his ear, looking away. He was indeed not proud of his conduct, but he harbored no regrets whatsoever.

"Even though I trust them, I've been betrayed in the past. Rather than be misled by over-optimism and naivety, I would rather preserve my standing in their eyes. The edge in Grade 2 Charisma Aether and the matching Aether Skills allow me to sway their decisions and opinions in the direction that suits me, but without it I just become dead weight."

Seeing that Fumdalf was about to throw another remark at him, his gaze hardened and he said,

"Don't get me wrong. I trust them now, but I have no faith in their future selves. People change all the time. I don't even trust myself to speak frankly. However, I do trust our leader. His character seems simple, but he is actually abnormally stubborn and he follows his principles resolutely. But he also has his shortcomings. He needs someone like me. We are complementary. As long as he stays the same, I'll stay loyal. If you hang out with us long enough, you'll also come to realize how unique he is."

Fumdalf became thoughtful in turn as Will went back to hunting with the others. The closer they got to the chosen infrastructure, the more frequent the encounters with Digestors became. Now that they were only a few kilometers away, they could hardly get a break and actually had to take some risks.

With Fumdalf's insight, the businessman no longer saw any reason to hold back. Reddish Aether Runes were imprinted across his throat and he yelled curtly at two goblins clad in a silver chitin exoskeleton,

"Kill each other."

This time his voice sounded different from the previous times. The surrounding Aether was siphoned off by those glowing runes, and the two Digestors did not just obey him subconsciously. This time, they were compelled. It was like a divine order from their general they could not decline.

The two goblins immediately turned to their kin hiding in the bushes with their bows aimed at them and savagely pounced on them with utter apathy. They exterminated their fellow goblins one after the other, getting stronger and faster each time and when the spell was about to end, Will sent a mental message and they slit their own throats, ending the one-sided battle.

Fumdalf grinned cryptically while Isskhar unwittingly shivered. Now, it was a friend worth having.

On the other side of this gigantic cavern, completely opposite Will and Fumdalf, another group of survivors were cautiously making their way to another facility. Unlike most of the survivors, their progress had been smooth and disturbingly uneventful.

In addition to not encountering any monsters, they had not run into any other survivors either. It was as if they were alone in the world. On top of that, there was an uneasy hush between them with one of them chained up.

This group consisted of four individuals, three of them human and one monstrous lion. It was the predatory aura of this huge feline that had kept the Digestors at bay until now.

Alas, they were about to learn that this advantage was also paired with an ugly downside: If this oppressive presence was enough to deter the weak goblins swarming this ashen forest, it had the unfortunate drawback of attracting much larger Digestors.

At this very moment, Kyle, Maeve, the veiled woman and Mufasa were facing such a creature.

It was another Taotie Digestor, similar in every way to the one Svara had narrowly survived, but its elephant ears were reminiscent of Shaktilar's, while the tips of its legs were reminiscent of the talons of a bird of prey. To annoy them even more, the monster was equipped with a double pair of short membranous wings. It was hard to tell at first if this heavy beast could fly, but Kyle definitely didn't want to find out.

"Can you kill it?" Kyle probed the giant lion, glancing insistently at the Taotie in front of them, which was feasting voraciously on the remains of a huge snake at least twenty meters long and as wide as a barrel.

The titanic silver python was being sucked into its mouth the way a human might swallow spaghetti. The Digestor would be done with its meal and digestion in less than a minute. It was the perfect time to cull him.

Mufasa roared with defiance at Kyle's insulting question, reacting as if his pride had just been trampled.

"Of course, I can. Just watch."

No sooner said than done. The feline stooped low, contracting his powerful muscles, then in one leap launched himself onto the Taotie who weighed almost as much as him. A clash of titans ensued, of extreme violence.

The fearless Digestor interrupted his meal and opened his mouth wide, focusing his prodigious suction power on the lion. Mufasa dodged nimbly with astounding speed for his size, executing a twisting somersault worthy of the best acrobats before landing hard on the beast's back, digging his claws deep into it.

The monster's scales were incredibly durable and a spray of sparks flew as Mufasa's claws clattered against them. He had to apply his full strength to finally break through the natural armor.

A stream of silver blood gushed out of the gaping wounds as the giant lion wreaked havoc over the creature's back, compulsively lacerating the beast, his fangs also planted deep in its neck.

The Taotie's nape was even stouter and Mufasa had not yet managed to reach an important artery, let alone break its spine in two. Applying even more force to the point that his jaw joints started to creak, the Digestor finally lost its haughtiness and became serious.

On its back, the scales chipped by Mufasa receded, leaving mini mouths crammed with teeth similar to the main jaw. The lion who was about to snap its neck suddenly felt a powerful suction under his belly and a searing pain paralyzed him in place.

When he finally managed to break free and landed on the ground a few meters away, a pool of red blood was rapidly pooling below him. Where his stomach should have been, there was now a huge half-sphere of emptiness about a meter in diameter. If the feline had been any smaller, he would have died by now.

Fortunately, Mufasa had achieved his goal. His Nergal claws and fangs were imbued with the attributes Life Drain, Corrosion, Bleeding and Disintegration. The Taotie's body had been lacerated deep through and through and his wounds were severe.

At this level, almost no enemy could survive such wounds. Even with the constant flow of energy from the freshly devoured silver snake and its unparalleled regeneration, the Digestor could do nothing if its wounds refused to coagulate.

The beast bled to death in a matter of moments, as its scales and flesh turned black and disintegrated. Conversely, Mufasa's gaping, bloody belly began to regenerate as the life energy absorbed by his claws and fangs gradually restored his health.

"Next time, we fight together."

Mufasa had finally deemed that his pride was not nearly as important as keeping his life.