

The Crafts 71

Chapter 71: I'll Stand With You

Right as Wally, Astar and Klein prepared to put an end to the helokiel, it abruptly began to shudder like a human undergoing a seizure.

"What the hell is happening?"

The trio were dumbfounded by the strange occurrence. There was no written record about desolate beasts undergoing frantic seizures, so the group of friends were inevitably confused about the situation.

"We have to kill it." Wally suddenly said as his instincts yelled at him.

Having fought against Lucas for a couple of days, Wally had improved considerably and gained certain skills he could call his own, one such being his sixth sense. Although he didn't know what was happening, Wally felt that it was very dangerous.

Klein nocked a black arrow with an orange arrowhead onto his bow. The arrow he used wasn't the 'cheap' variation he had been firing all this while, but ones that were very expensive. He could only afford three of them after scraping his savings for an entire year.

Originally, Klein had no intention of using these arrows during the mid-term practical tests, and had only gotten them for the finals, but he brought one of the arrows just in case he would need it.

Seeing as Wally was almost in a hysteria and the helokiel was laying down wide open, Klein decided to end it once and for all. As for the agreement to have Astar take the last hit, that would depend on his luck. If the monster was left on its last legs, then Astar could proceed. If it wasn't, there was nothing Klein could do. Their survival mattered more than a few dozen points.

Once the arrow was set in place, Klein aimed it at the chest of the monster, in the position where its heart was meant to be.

Twang

The bowstring was released and the arrow darted through the air as it made its way to the helokiel. The speed of the arrow couldn't compare with Wally's previous spear throw, but it was still not something one could dodge so easily. With the desolate beast undergoing a severe seizure, it was all the more unlikely for the arrow to miss its target.

Just then, the aura of the helokiel went through the roof. The energy it exuded was no longer the same as a peak first level Apertures Opening stage desolate beast, but closely approaching that of a second level. It was almost indistinguishable at this point as the trio felt cold sweat seep through their skin.

The arrow was still on its way when this happened, but it immediately arrived before the desolate beast before the next second. It struck the monster and penetrated through its tough hides, almost as if it were cotton.

Whoosh

An orange flame burst out from the arrowhead which had penetrated the monster. The wound was set ablaze as the flames erupted from the spot, charring the flesh of the desolate beast black. Despite this, the helokiel was unmoved and didn't even scream. It merely retained its jerking state while a part of its body was set ablaze.

"What is going on?"

Astar and Wally were surprised whereas Klein was flabbergasted.

Klein knew the power of the arrow he had shot. It was almost equivalent to a one-time usage Grade 1 vestige in terms of power as it was an arrow that contained the outer flames of a vestige-smith's furnace. These were flames used in refining metals for the production of vestiges. The temperature was insanely high, and its burn damage was nothing to joke about.

Yet, even with all of that, the helokiel didn't make any reaction.

"Run!"

Wally shouted as he turned around to escape.

Although there was no explanation for what took place, one thing was for sure; remaining behind was suicide.

Klein followed suit and even Astar, who was pro-battle before, didn't stop to question or convince anyone otherwise and also escaped.

While the trio ran, the aura of the monster slowly increased until it settled into the second level for the Apertures Opening stage. It didn't stop at the 'entrance' but went a bit in until it was completely stable. With a roar, the helokiel regained its composure and shook away its fatigue. It was in a new self, and even with the injuries previously afflicted on it, the creature felt reborn.

Being at the second level, the poison used on it was no longer as effective and the helokiel could ignore it. The injury on its left hind leg slowly closed up as the arrow was forced out together with the poison and infected blood. Its wings couldn't recover back, but the helokiel was more energetic than before.

As for the seating flames on its body, the desolate beast shook once, releasing a grey streak of energy that put the flames out.

After settling its composure in place, it glanced at the direction the trio ran and chased after them.

Unlike before, the group of three failed to find any hiding spots and were forced to remain on the run. However, they could only go so far before the helokiel caught up to them.

It was now a second level Apertures Opening stage desolate beast, and even if it wasn't, catching a group of humans below the peak Body Strengthening stage even with a head start wasn't anything difficult.

"Damn it. What the heck happened?" Klein cursed as he ran.

Suddenly, he felt a gaze on his body. His blood ran cold and without even a hint, Klein knew that the helokiel was eyeing him. It was probably still incensed by the harassment shots and what's more, the flaming arrow Wally had used just a while ago.

'N,no.'

Klein began to feel desperate as he forced himself to run quicker.

However, his legs could only do so little so for him.

"Klein!"

Wally's cry sounded as the helokiel appeared just behind Klein with a claw outstretched.

"Damn it." Klein cursed before activating the bracelet given to him by the academy.

Although the protective light shield could activate automatically, Klein didn't want to take the risk and wait for that, deciding to do so himself.

Bang

The helokiel's claw crashed into the shield and forced Klein back, but he was at least safe from that attack.

But that was for now.

The light shield could only handle three attacks from a second level Apertures Opening stage desolate beast. Usually, that would have given enough time for the staff on duty to dispatch a freelancer to the scene, but the situation was different. The students weren't aware that most of the staff and freelancers had already been killed by two terrorists.

Even if they didn't know, some could figure out that the appearance of the terrorists would lead to a delayed rescue effort. This was why the trio's first response was to try and escape. They could guess that there was no one coming to help them, as if there were, they would have showed up minutes ago.

"You guys should run while you still can. I'll try to hold it back." Klein shouted at the two.

"You can't! You'll die." Astar screamed.

"Just shut up and run!" Klein didn't look back at them but faced the helokiel with his bow in hand.

"Don't let us all die here. Better one than all three."

With tears in their eyes, Wally and Astar wanted to stay back, but they knew that Klein was right. If they remained behind, everyone would die. But if Klein stood back, he could at least buy some time for the two of them. His shield had also been activated and the helokiel seemed intent on taking him, which made things easier for them.

However, they couldn't just abandon their friend.

"It's all my fault. I'm sorry. I'm really sorry." Astar cried as he ran away.

Klein sighed, but didn't hate him. Survival was an instinct of every living being. Just as he prepared to take on the helokiel, he noticed that Wally hadn't left.

"You..."

"Shut up and focus!" Wally roared. He didn't run as Klein had wanted; he couldn't.

Even if there was a chance at surviving by doing so, Wally knew that such a chance was nothing more than a fleeting hope. With the speed of a second level helokiel, it would catch up to him eventually. The only hope would be to encounter a freelancer or teacher on the way, but if that were to happen, it would have been so a couple of minutes ago.

As it stood, death was pretty much certain no matter which option it was.

However, there was a small viable shot at living if they fought the helokiel. It was still injured, so maybe they could kill. But Wally knew that this was also a futile wish.

In this moment of life and death, Wally simply decided to stand by his friend. Since they were going to die either way, he might as well die with someone having his back.