

Evolution 139

Chapter 139: Securing the Treasures.

A second chime rang... deep, low, and final. Then, from the darkness behind the curtain, the hostess emerged.

She walked towards the podium while smiling welcomingly at all the attendees. She was wearing a white dress with heels, leaving her pale bronze skin to shimmer under the dim light.

After a short greeting, the host kicked off the auction right away, understanding that their clients were busy people.

"The bidding now begins... As tradition binds us, no words shall be spoken, no gestures made. Only intent will carry your will."

She raised her hand slightly.

"Make your bids through Astra AI. Your names will not be shown. What you claim here... remains yours alone."

Her hand lowered.

A soft click echoed.

The stage split open in its center, and from within, a small, soft flower emerged in the open. It was kinda bluish mixed in with violet. It had weird glowing lines running through its petals, like veins, but prettier.

"Lot One: Veinleaf Bloom, a flower that only opens under moonlight during full spiritual alignment. It can be used to enhance one's spiritual presence or as a main material for psych specialization, evolutionary formulas. Bidding begins now."

The hall fell into perfect stillness.

The lights dimmed slightly.

Levi leaned forward in his seat, his expression unreadable. Around him, not a soul moved. The only sound came from the pedestal's subtle hum and the occasional faint sigh of someone exhaling through their nose.

While the auction was as silent as a graveyard at midnight, Levi could feel the intense bidding war going on in the shadows.

'This system is brutal... The bids aren't made public, which puts the bidders in a state of uncertainty. The only way to get rid of it is to continue bidding until it stops.'

Levi had read the rules of the auction before he stepped in. Based on the rules, neither the items nor the bidders were given a bidding range.

The auction began with the highest bid, forcing everyone to keep putting in a larger bid each time it got rejected.

For example, if one bid two thousand coins, it wouldn't show. The only one with knowledge of the bid was its owner.

The rest had to keep trying until they either reached the bid or crossed it. They had to do it in a short period of two minutes.

Worse? They only had five bids each to ensure no one fooled the system by applying tens of bids, increasing them by small amounts each time.

This pushed everyone to either go big or go home.

After two minutes, the highest bid would win the item.

The auction house claimed to use this system for the sake of utter anonymity; even the final price of the item wouldn't be known to the others. However, everyone knew that it was for the sake of raking in more coins.

After all, this system forced the bidders to go way overboard with the initial bid just to secure it in the end.

Two minutes later, the bidding war concluded, and the natural treasure was pulled under the stage, leaving room for the second one.

No one knew who won it or by how much. Though Levi easily picked up on the winner by filtering everyone's heartbeats... It took him no time to notice the only bidder with the highest number of beats.

'Nice, it works.' Levi smiled inwardly, 'I can spy on my competition and gain an advantage like this.'

Soon, Levi kept training his filtration process with each bid until the moment his desired item was finally placed on the podium.

"Lot Fifteen: Echo Crystal, Grade B, a clear gem that soaks up sounds around it and enhances their volume when released... Used mostly in evolutionary formulas. Start the bidding."

'The known market price is six thousand coins... I am sure no one will bid it straightaway.' Levi tuned out the noises, leaving everyone's heartbeats to resound in his mind.

It was like he was sitting in a dark room with close to sixty hearts surrounding him. Some beat fast naturally, some beat slow, some beat normal, and some skip beats...

Levi focused only on the hearts with emotional investment... In no time, he limited his bidders' list to five... Then, he prioritized those targets, listening to the faintest noise produced by them.

One of them was in the VIP balcony, a distance away from Nurah and her mother.

The bidders refrained from even whispering, knowing that only VIP rooms were soundproof.

But those inside? They didn't care, knowing that their voices couldn't be spied on.

Alas... Levi's echolocation was perfection, able to bypass the standard soundproof systems.

The moment Levi heard any type of noise inside the room, it didn't matter if it was air or something fainter... a sound string surfaced, and Levi casually struck it.

At once... A soft-spoken voice was heard.

—Echo Crystal, I might need it in my next evolution attempt. I read Dr Isaac's public research notes about it. He said that the Crystal can balance the mixture of many formulas...—

As Levi listened to the soft-spoken voice, he had a feeling that he had heard it somewhere.

Then, it clicked.

'Is that Alaric's voice? The Sunstrike's agency vice leader?' If Levi had eyes, they would have widened a bit in disbelief.

What were the odds of them butting heads again on another treasure? The ironic part? Sir Alaric also desired the Echo Crystal for his evolution. Though not guaranteed, but still.

—One minute eclipsed... This should be enough to secure it.—

Hearing this, Levi wanted to predict how much Sir Alaric had bid on the natural treasure, but it was harder than it showed without a price range in mind.

Levi swiftly tapped on the other bidders and noticed that many of them were sighing hopelessly, probably having their bids rejected multiple times.

This was enough to let them know that the highest bid had crossed the average market price of the treasure... They weren't that desperate to lay down such big numbers on a Grade B treasure.

Just like that, Levi realized that Sir Alaric was about to win the bid as no one dared to rise up to the challenge... It looked like Sir Alaric noticed the same after the hall quietened down.

Unbeknownst to him, Levi was doing mental gymnastics to guess his bid. He started with making the most obvious bid.

'Six thousand coins.' Levi tapped the number on a pen-like device inside his pocket.

This was an external holographic device connected to the Neuralens, used mostly to produce large-scale holograms.

In Levi's case, he purchased it just for the sake of typing in what he needed from Astra AI without needing to speak.

'Bid fail, amount low.' Astra AI shared deep in his mind.

Levi tried again with eight thousand coins.

'Bid fail, amount low.'

"Thirty seconds remaining." The hostess announced calmly.

'Half a minute is left. This leaves me with two options.' Levi pondered deeply, 'I can either go up bit by bit until I surpass Sir Alaric's bid. Or wait until the last seconds and steal it with the best possible bid.'

Levi understood that the first option was a bit too risky. Sir Alaric would be alerted the moment his bid was beaten. Since there was not much time left, he might bid double the crystal's market price to secure it. However, if Levi went for the second method, he would be risking it all on one single bid.

After thinking about it for a few moments, Levi waited patiently until only three seconds remained in the bidding window.

Then, he placed his final bid.

The moment it registered, the Hostess smashed the gavel twice on the podium.

"Sold!"

Levi held his breath patiently, awaiting the message.

A second later, which felt like forever, it came.

'Congratulations, you have successfully purchased The Echo Crystal. The coins were wired automatically from your account. You can pick it up or request a delivery.'

'Oooof, I actually snatched it.' Levi sighed deeply in relief within his mind, leaving a polite poker face on the outside.

Immediately, he started eavesdropping on Sir Alaric.

—What's going on? Someone outbid me at the last second? It can't be? Who's foolish enough to drop more than eleven thousand coins on this?!

The more questions he asked, the angrier he seemed to get... Unfortunately, there were no redos, and if he wanted to secure the treasure, he should have bid so much more; nothing would ever faze him.

That's the law of the game.

'Eleven thousand? It's good that I went with my instincts and bid much higher than ten thousand coins.'

Levi smirked inwardly.

His rational side had told him that it was unrealistic for Alaric to bid above ten thousand coins on his first-ever bid... But Levi's instincts screamed the opposite.

This made Levi think really hard about whether an additional two thousand coins were more important than evolving this week.

No!

This answer drove him to put in his new bid, uncaring that he paid for double the treasure's market rate.

—First, the Sensebound Pearl and now this... I am really having a bad luck streak this month. Whatever... I'm not evolving anytime soon.—

Soon, Levi's attention returned to Sir Alaric, and he noticed that his heartbeat had settled down. For beings like him, he would never allow such failures to consume too much of his energy... Especially when he was still quite far from his evolution.

In his eyes, he was bound to land on another Echo Crystal in the upcoming months.

'One down, one more to go.'

Levi refocused on the next bid, knowing that Sonic Amber was much easier to purchase than Echo Crystal. It was used in extremely rare evolutionary formulas, which drove the demand for it to an all-time low.

As expected, the moment it was displayed, Levi noticed that only a few bidders went for it.

This time, Levi didn't wait until the end. He joined in the bidding war, placing a decent bid of four thousand coins.

The bidders tried to win it back by increasing the bid by a low margin. Alas, all their bids failed, leaving them shaking their heads in disinterest.

One minute later...

"Sold!"

Levi received the congratulation message, and he finally let out a sigh of relief. Sensing his change in demeanor, Shia smiled, "You got what you came for?"

"You can say so." Levi smiled, "Thanks for the invite."

"Don't mention it..." Shia's smile widened, "We are already dolled up, how about we go for dinner?"

"Sure, why not?" Levi offered while standing up, uncaring about the rest of the auctioned items, "I am paying."