

Evolution 72

Chapter 72: He Just Made it Personal.

All candidates were summoned outside the apartment complex and marched to a sealed, industrial-looking building that resembled an old factory. Its yellow walls stood in contrast to the green surroundings, and its glass ceiling glistened under the daylight... an observation point for the nightcrawlers.

Instructor Seraphis hovered above them as always, stoic and authoritative, forcing everyone to stand straight like cadets under inspection.

The sky above quickly darkened... not with clouds, but with hundreds of watching eyes. Nightcrawlers began tuning in one by one... each of them more unsettling than the last.

Eyes of all shapes, colors, and eerie designs peered from the void, fixed solely on the candidates below.

"I hope you've had a good night's rest..." Instructor Seraphis declared. "Your brain will need it."

He clapped once, and the massive entrance doors of the factory groaned open slowly.

Gasps echoed from the crowd.

Inside... lay a series of elven corridors lined one after the other. Elegant, carved, mystic... completely unexpected.

At the far end, linking the halls together, stood a giant wooden statue shaped like a wyvern... wings outstretched, maw open, and an aura of ancient wrath carved into its features.

Its details were dulled by age and material... but the sheer pressure it emanated was unmistakable.

"Just like every time I've overseen a Contract Ritual Assembly... I've left behind a small gift. Paid for from my own pocket... as an incentive to give it your all," Instructor Seraphis announced.

The candidates didn't react much. They had heard of this tradition before... his 'gifts' were always difficult to claim, and not once had anyone succeeded.

But then... everything changed with his next words.

"This year... the gift is hidden in The Trial of Intelligence," Instructor Seraphis continued. "It's the sealed Wyvern."

He pointed toward the totem at the end of the corridor.

"A Tier 2 nightcrawler from the Aerowyvern species... Anyone who manages to free it will take it home as their personal Nighthount."

Gasps... silence... then a wave of electric excitement washed through the candidates!

-Whooah!-

-A flying Tier 2 nightcrawler as a starting Nightmount?! Instructor Seraphis sure knows how to spoil his candidates.-

-Spoil? Spoil my ass! The last time he hid a B-grade Assault Totem in the Trial of Combat, no one found it!-

-Looool... I remember that day. The candidates almost fainted from shock after finding out that the assault totem was always used as decoration at the front gate of the apartment complex.-

The viewers' sentiments were shared by most candidates. While everyone could be seen salivating to own the Wyvern as a Nightmount, they knew deep down their chances were even worse than last year's candidates.

That's because the Trial of Intelligence was one of the hardest ones to pass with good marks... unless the Instructor made it easier for them.

Sadly, Instructor Seraphis wasn't one of them.

Rumble! Rumble!

Suddenly, walls started emerging inside the corridors, splitting each one into four sections, leaving the candidates to stare at a closed door leading to the first section of each hall.

"Welcome to The Hall of Silent Totems. There are eleven halls for eleven candidates starting at once. Each candidate will be tasked with finding the correct incantation of the hidden totem in each section of a hall. The clues needed will be presented in each section differently."

"The difficulty and complexity of the incantation will increase with each section completed successfully."

"Each group will have half an hour to complete the Hall of Silent Totems. Candidates who fail to complete a single section will score zero in the trials and will be instantly eliminated."

"Am I understood?"

"Yes, sir..."

This time, the candidates weren't as enthusiastic. Most of them felt their hearts pounding out of their chests in anxiety.

Ilthorien language might have been taught in school as a second language from an early age, but it wasn't the same one used for incantation.

It was like comparing simple speech-language with the one used in literature. In this case, it was much worse.

If the Physical Trial was a gym test, then the Intelligence Trial was a written test... Everyone hated written tests.

Well, not everyone.

"Sounds quite fun." Levi smiled.

"Fun... Big bro, I think this will be it for me."

Arthur's eyes reflected pure dread and despair. Even his hands were shaking nervously, like he was in the presence of an angered father.

"Don't overthink it." Levi chuckled. "I doubt the first section will be difficult... Instructor Seraphis can't afford to have many candidates kicked out in the Trial of Intelligence."

This was the only thing keeping some candidates' hopes up of scoring something in this trial. They knew that the Trial of Intelligence was the least important one for the nightcrawlers out of the rest.

After all, the Physicality Trial was used to highlight the candidates for Enhancement Specialization, while the Spirituality Trial was for the few rare candidates with high spiritual presence.

The Combat Trial was the most important one since it examined the candidates' battle mastery.

As for the Intelligence Trial? While no one said that having great intelligence wouldn't be good in combat or just day-to-day scenarios, as long as a candidate wasn't a brainless zombie, most nightcrawlers wouldn't care.

Alas, such thoughts evaporated from everyone's mind after Instructor Seraphis presented them with the rules of the challenge on a massive holographic screen.

There were only two rules, but they were enough to sink the hearts of many candidates.

//- Silence is Absolute: Only the correct incantation can be spoken. If any other incantation or word unrelated to it is spoken, the displayed totem changes.

-Astra AI and Holograms: They can be used, but she must not be asked about information related to totems.//

"Mama, bless me with some of your intelligence, or your boy is screwed."

Arthur immediately looked into the heavens with moist eyes, feeling like he was about to step into his grave.

Hearing his brother's woes made Levi's heart a bit restless as he knew that Arthur wasn't reliable in such challenges that required brainpower.

He always allowed his nervousness to get the best of him, even if the question was simple and he knew the answer beforehand.

While Levi had kept tabs on his studies when he moved to the Blood Hunters agency and noticed a great improvement, he couldn't leave his elimination to chance.

'The instructor said that the displayed totems would change if the incantation was wrong, but he hasn't added a rule that limits the changes.' Levi analyzed the challenge deeply. 'Did he forget about such a detail? It can't be. He has spent months preparing for these challenges... he would never leave such a loophole.'

The fact that Instructor Seraphis had planned for a hidden challenge in the Physicality Trial made it even harder to accept.

Unless...

Suddenly, Levi's eyebrows rose a bit as he glanced at Instructor Seraphis' spiritual aura. He was occupied with preparing the groups, but he still felt Levi's spiritual gaze. When they noticed each other, a similar faint smirk broke off their lips.

'How shrewd and kind.'

Levi chuckled inwardly as he nudged his brother, attracting his attention. Then, he told him what he needed to do if he was stuck at an impasse.

He kept it at this, not wanting to go over details to avoid displeasing Instructor Seraphis... but it was enough to restore some color to Arthur's face.

After the groups were decided, Levi found himself paired up with Nurah, Demetris, Selene, and a couple more high-ranked candidates. Arthur, Jojo, Melissa, and Rayan were split into different groups.

They were ordered to gather with their group members and wait for their turns.

His group was the most stacked one, which attracted the nightcrawlers' and viewers' utmost attention.

Levi didn't know if Instructor Seraphis did this on purpose to blaze the competition between them or not, but he could feel Demetris' piercing eyes at the back of his neck.

Demetris didn't leave it at that. He approached Levi from the back and whispered near his ear, "Your time to shine was yesterday. Ilthorien language is my first b*tch and you will be the second."

"I don't think there's a need for such foul language." Levi turned his head to face him and spoke with a deep frown. "I don't care if you cursed me, but you better show some respect to Ilthorien."

"Or what?" Demetris sneered and continued whispering near his ear, "What can a disabled prick like you even do?"

"So you know? Congratulations, I guess," Levi asked calmly. "What now? Are you going to out me? Rat me to the Instructor?"

He wasn't that surprised, as he knew that the moment Demetris got access to the network, he'd look for information about him.

While he wouldn't find anything since Levi's information was classified by the government, Levi had met someone related to him... his big brother, Mantis.

Levi was certain that Mantis would expose him to his brother and maybe rat him out to the Instructor to get him eliminated.

However, he didn't expect Demetris' next response.

"No, no, no... why would I do such a thing?" Demetris smiled coldly. "A hero always needs a villain to shine brighter. You, my little empty-eyed mongrel, fit the description."

Before Levi could respond, Nurah's voice resounded from behind them.

"Having a rivalry meeting without me? How insensitive."

She pouted playfully for a moment, but after sensing the chilling atmosphere between them, her expression turned sober.

"Good luck."

Demetris nodded at them both like an upstanding citizen and walked away, awaiting his group's turn. After he left, Nurah turned to Levi and felt her heart skip a beat after seeing his expression.

He was smiling, but just barely... the kind of smile that shouldn't exist in this moment. Too calm... too fake. His head was affixed in Demetris' direction, making her feel like he was staring at something already decided.

She didn't know why, but she had a feeling like she was standing in the presence of a nightcrawler. Nurah had been interacting with them since a young age, too, which made her feel even more disturbed.

"Did something happen?" she asked.

"Nothing much." Levi said with the same eerie smile. "He just made it personal."

Levi's patience was near saint level, and he had no problems with being bothered, cursed, ignored, or whatnot. He always smiled at such petty problems, believing his energy should be focused on bigger issues.

But when someone made fun of his condition and meant it as an insult? Nothing else mattered besides restoring balance.

He had gotten too much crap for over a decade by nightcrawlers about his condition and he always retaliated back with words, knowing that he couldn't do more even if he wanted to.

Now that it came from the mouth of another human, Levi would never let it slide... especially when his condition was related to his parents' death.

Before Nurah could ask him for details, Levi gave her a polite head nod and walked to an empty area.

"Group F, kick off the trial!"