

## Evolution 73

Chapter 73: The Hall of Silent Totems.

Following Instructor Seraphis' order, Arthur and nine more candidates walked towards the ten doors. Some were nervous, some were focused, and some were chilled. A few candidates had prepared for this trial for years in advance.

Ka-thumb!...

The moment Arthur stepped inside the first section, the door closed behind him, and he was introduced to a small room with four walls illuminated by a single bioluminescent crystal.

All the walls started to glow faintly with mysterious Ilthorien runes, appearing like they were holding hands and dancing before Arthur.

But this wasn't part of the trial as it was happening only to Arthur, who was suffering from visual dyslexia.

'Damn it, can you not... just once?' Arthur murmured in his mind, feeling his eyes shifting and losing focus.

He blinked hard and then read the first phrase in his sight.

'Va'therin os ulm'ka...' The letters warped...  $\text{V\lambda't\theta\epsilon\rho\iota\iota\omicron\varsigma\ \omicron\lambda\omega'ka.}$

'Does it mean "the lost one walks alone"? Or "who walks alone is lost"? Aaaaaaa...'

Arthur felt like he had to invest all of his brain's processing power to do basic reading. He hated this more than anything else, as it made him feel stupid and useless.

That's why he started hating studies. He stopped feeling like he was gaining knowledge and instead felt like he was waging war with the letters.

Since that cursed night, reading had become a battle every time he got nervous. While he wasn't there personally, the news and his brother's condition were more than enough to traumatize him for life.

It didn't help that he received the news while reading a storybook...

'Stay put, damn it!'

Arthur slammed his fists against the wall and rubbed his eyes. This seemed to help for a moment as the letters returned to their positions.

"The totems will arise in three... two... one. Your timer has begun!"

Following Instructor Seraphis' announcement, Arthur noticed a small axe-like wooden totem pop out of the platform. It started spinning on its axis, akin to a treasure on display at a museum.

'Is this an assault totem?' Arthur frowned, not recognizing the totem at all.

He knew there were millions of totems, if not more, making it extremely difficult to memorize every single one and its incantation.

But he knew some tips... If weapon-shaped, it was an Assault totem. If defensive-shaped, it was a Protection totem. If bottle-shaped, a Recovery totem. If animal-shaped, a Sealing totem. If symbol-shaped, a Skill totem.

There were many other unnamed types, but Arthur didn't know much about them... they were used only by upper-ranked Daywalkers. Too rare and potent for their knowledge to be spread publicly.

While the totem's shape generally decided its effect, there were always exceptions.

'It's impossible for this to be a trick question right off the bat. So, this must be an Assault totem... but what is it? I haven't read about an axe-shaped Assault totem before.' Arthur frowned.

While he was struggling to recognize the totem, a candidate in his group had already cleared the first section, opening the door to the next level. Arthur realized it after hearing the noise.

'Do I give it a shot and try to analyze the incantation from the walls?'

The moment this thought crossed his mind, the glowing letters on the walls started jumping again... dancing chaotically, overwhelming him.

'F\*ck it... let's do what Levi said.' Arthur gave up and spoke aloud, "Pass."

The moment the word left his mouth, the walls dimmed for a few seconds. Then, they glowed red before the totem was pulled inside the platform and replaced with another.

Arthur glanced at the new wooden bottle-like totem in silence. When nothing else happened, he did the same again.

The totem was replaced with another. When Arthur didn't recognize it either, he passed again. After doing this three more times with no penalty, his grin widened.

'Big bro was right.'

Levi had told him that since Instructor Seraphis hadn't placed a rule limiting the number of changes, he might theoretically keep changing the totems until the end of the trial!

Thus, the best course of action was to keep passing on unfamiliar totems until he landed on one he had memorized during preparation.

Since the first section was the easiest, the totems weren't that rare.

After Arthur changed the totem two more times, he finally landed on one he had read about just a week ago...a Recovery totem used to heal burn wounds. Its incantation was still fresh in his mind.

"Vael'thura en'shakai, rekthor os luminar... light restore, heal the burn, the pain no more." Arthur spelled out the incantation with a thick accent.

Unlike Levi, he wasn't fluent in the slightest... he rarely spoke Ilthorien day to day. Still, the pronunciation was correct, and that's all that mattered for low-grade totems.

The inscriptions on the Recovery totem lit up briefly and released their light onto the walls, shifting their white glow to green.

The platform pulled back into the ground, and the door unlocked to the next section. Arthur exhaled in relief and stepped forward.

'Maybe I can go all the way using this loophole?' He grinned after noticing the same setup.

Alas, he soon discovered that Instructor Seraphis' kindness extended only to the first section. The totem didn't change after Arthur passed on it... Instead, the inscriptions engraved on it and the walls began shifting!

With his visual dyslexia in full effect, Arthur was left staring helplessly, his mind going completely blank.

'Yep... I ain't doing all that.'

Arthur sat down and meditated for the next half hour, understanding his limitations well.

He had just started memorizing and learning Ilthorien seriously in the past two months. There was no way in hell he'd be able to extract the incantations from those walls.

Arthur didn't need to feel too bad... most candidates had it rough in the second section. Even those who were well-prepared.

After half an hour, only two of them made it to the third section.

Soon, the doors unlocked and the candidates returned to the main gathering area. Each result appeared on the large holographic screen.

"How did it go?" Levi asked.

"I used your tip to pass the first section, but that was it. The next sections have the inscriptions on the totems and the walls changing instead." Arthur sighed in relief. "As long as I didn't score zero, we chilling."

"I see."

Levi had expected as much from Instructor Seraphis. He understood the loophole was a mercy, for saving time, and to avoid eliminating too many candidates outright.

If someone couldn't solve a section or figure out the trick... tough luck.

Soon, the next group entered...Jojo and Melissa were among them. Although Levi hadn't shared the loophole with his friends, he wasn't worried. They had talked yesterday about both trials, and he knew neither of them struggled with reading like Arthur.

As expected, Melissa solved the second section while Jojo made it to the fourth before time ran out. For now, Jojo was in the lead.

Levi quickly asked what he could expect inside. Jojo told him the clues got weirder and weirder with each level.

Before she could go into detail, Instructor Seraphis called out, "Group A, move up."

"It's my turn. See you guys in a bit."

Levi nodded at his friends and walked to the central hall, closest to him.

But before he reached it, Demetris appeared and cut him off, standing in front of the door with a hidden scornful glare... silently declaring he was the center of the stage, not Levi.

Levi let out a faint chuckle and simply turned, walking to the last remaining hall at the far corner. Nurah walked beside him, giggling behind her hand.

"What did you do to warrant such hatred?" she asked.

"I don't know how it started... but I know how it's going to end." Levi smiled serenely.

"Oh? Just don't forget about me."

Nurah's obsidian eyes gleamed dangerously, letting him know she wasn't to be taken lightly either.

"I'll think about it... If I see you on the other side."



Levi smiled playfully in her direction and entered the room, unaware that his words had melted the danger from Nurah's eyes and replaced it with a slight red hue on her cheeks.

"How cheeky..." She murmured.

Once all candidates entered the first section and the doors shut, Instructor Seraphis called out, "Three... two... one... your timer has begun!"

Ting! Ting! Ting!...

Almost immediately, Levi, Nurah, and Demetris had solved the first section and rushed into the second.

Before the viewers could even react, all three cleared the second section simultaneously... in less than three seconds!!