

Oracle 583

Chapter 583 - Decent Weapon

"Holy shit, this blizzard will never end!" The Orange Turkey gurgled in outrage, his beady black eyes bulging with anger.

Of course, no one could understand the unintelligible gurgles spewing from his beak, but even without reading his Aether fluctuations or using telepathy, it was obvious what he was trying to communicate.

Because they all agreed with him.

Aside from Crunch, whose fur was suited to the coldest of climates, the others were beginning to dislike this place and its harsh weather even more.

Besides the invariable landscape being an endless succession of identical snow dunes, the visibility was awful because of the blizzard blowing constantly and they had to be careful not to be swallowed alive by a Snowworm buried too close.

Until now, Jake had always detected these Digestors in time, but mainly because they hadn't really tried to hide. The snowy bulges accompanying their movements made them easy to track, but at least they had to come from far enough away. What would happen if one of these monsters were sleeping under their feet?

This scenario had happened several times before. Jake could pick up several large presences resting beneath them, but because they were walking silently, these Snowworms hadn't spotted them. Whenever he had any doubt, he would use his telekinesis to levitate them to the next dune.

So far these evasive maneuvers had been successful, but in the last few minutes the blizzard had grown fiercer and the temperature had dropped sharply. Now Jake had to deal with hailstones the size of golf balls as fast as a bullet. The barely smaller snowflakes were almost as hard and the snow around them was now completely icy.

"Is it because we are getting closer to the goal?" Crunch meowed as he chewed on one of the hailstones.

"It better be... because I'm not going to last much longer." Melkree shivered, not hiding her deep seated sense of insecurity.

As a Dryad, and even more so as a tree, she had never been in such a precarious situation. All she wanted now was to become a tree again in her native forest and forget everything else. The caress of the sun, the rain and a lush fertilizer wrapping her roots...

In retrospect, it was not all that bad. At least it was a carefree life and she didn't have to deal with all these emotions that made her unstable and miserable.

"We're almost there." Jake said serenely, shaking her out of her nostalgic replay.

For a while now, his body had been shining like a beacon in the night, producing the light and warmth that Melkree and the turkey needed to stay alive. Currently, he was walking ahead of the group, the warm aura surrounding him melting the hailstones before they could reach them.

The problem was that these hailstones were not normal ice. Although it felt just a little chilly from Jake's perspective, his Oracle Device was adamant. The outside temperature was -80°C by the current Aether density standard of 64. The temperature felt, because of the blizzard blowing at several hundred miles per hour, was close to -150°C.

On Earth, this would have been an apocalyptic weather capable of decimating all life forms on Earth or close to that, but with their abilities they were able to survive with tremendous efforts, but not for long.

"I see something!" Crunch meowed as he squinted his eyes.

"That's why I said we were almost there." Jake smiled. "Because I wasn't sure what it was I didn't want to disappoint you."

What Jake and his cat saw, Melkree and the Orange Turkey also saw moments later. It was a faint orange glow, almost indistinguishable in the blizzard. If Jake believed his eyes and his instincts, someone had started a campfire.

It wasn't that Jake hadn't considered that option, but where would he have lit it? Other than these snowy dunes, there was nothing. He could have built an igloo, but Jake had noticed that the Snowworms never left them alone for long.

Besides, the one time he had used his flames to attack, two of those Digestors had come back within seconds. Maybe it was just a coincidence, but Jake had stuck to his Air Blades after that.

Melkree had been off Crunch's back for a while now, preferring to walk behind Jake. At some point, she realized that the light radiating from him warmed her more than the big cat's soaked fur.

Because of the hailstones and flakes constantly hitting her fur, they had accumulated on the feline's back and because of his internal heat these had quickly melted, soaking the cat's fur. Since the blizzard had intensified, this water had started to freeze and stalactites were quickly forming along his fur.

Crunch was aware of this and once in a while he would shake his fur to get rid of it, but it would refreeze immediately after. Tired of it, he gave up, leaving his fur like that, much to the turkey's disappointment.

This was precisely the reason why he was gobbling angrily to himself a few minutes earlier.

Tac!

Suddenly, Melkree tripped over something, drawing the attention of the whole group to her. At first she thought it was exhaustion and cold that caused her to stumble, until she discovered what her foot had just hit.

"Shaktilar?" She muttered impassively before shaking her head. "No, it's just another Shyril."

Jake came to her side in an instant and brushed off the snow in front of her with a swipe of his hand. Seeing that the snow was too hard, he breathed a stream of flame onto the thing Melkree had bumped into, revealing what lay beneath.

It was an alien head. Two ivory tusks about a meter long protruding out of the mouth and huge elephant ears spread out on either side of the skull. This Evolver's trunk had been sliced clean off and its eyes were glassy, reminiscent of Urul's other victims.

When Melkree explained to him that the Shyrils placed their Oracle Device around their trunks he got a better understanding of what had just happened.

"So in the end we were not alone here." Jake sighed.

The visibility was so bad that they hadn't run into anyone but these Snowworms, but he now had proof that other Evolvers had made it here. Alas, they had run into Urul on the way.

The circumstances were very similar to the Digestor camp on the previous floor. There, too, the survivors had gathered to confront the Digestor boss, unaware that the very enemy they had to be wary of was actually on their side.

If Jake's hypothesis was correct, he was no longer in such a hurry to meet the maker of this campfire.

Just to be on the safe side, the group searched the area for other victims and they managed to dig up a bunch. Dozens of Shyrils working for Shaktilar, as well as numerous beasts adapted to the winter climate.

Shaktilar had shown his talent for ice magic, and these Shyrils should have excelled in this environment, but in the end they had been wiped out by a single black orc. However, their leader was not among those corpses.

Jake was relieved to find no Myrtharian Nerds among the dead. It would seem that most of them had good survival instincts and had confined themselves to an area suitable for their level. This was not surprising from former cowards.

'But I couldn't find any trace of Kyle, Will, Grash or Svava. Where are you guys?'

Melkree offered to retrieve the bodies, but Jake replied that he had no more room in his Space Storage or Faction Vault, which was partly true. As a compromise, he incinerated them, but kept their equipment.

It was the only consolation prize for playing scavenger after Urul. The Black Orc would rob them of their souls and bracelets every time, but he didn't care about the rest.

Unfortunately, there was a logical explanation for this. Their equipment was tailored to their body type and few humans were able to wear them. Some were Digestor drops.

This made him realize that these drops were not completely random and that the Dungeon could adjust its rewards to encourage the winners.

"These Snowworms didn't drop anything..." Crunch grated, brooding as he walked.

Jake wasn't happy either. After all their efforts and having his Luck Aether, they should have at least gotten some kind of reward.

[I think these Digestors were more of a failure than we thought.] Xi gave her opinion. [This Dungeon Digestor is still young. So far it has only copied the anatomy and ability of the present Evolvers. There must have been one or two creatures similar to these Snowworms in the horde of beasts, and he attempted a fusion. If I'm right, these beasts had no Aether Skills and given their size no relevant items

could come out of it. It's also likely that due to its immaturity, the Dungeon Digester is not yet creative enough to produce proper rewards.]

" In short, did we come too early? It's like an amusement park. Never come at the opening day..."

[Hmm, you can look at it that way...]

Still, among the Shyrils' equipment, there were a few useful pieces, namely their weapons. Despite their large size and weight, they were perfectly usable. There were two Inferior Aether Artifacts and one Intermediate Aether Artifact, namely a Mage Staff, an Enchanted Revolver and a Digester Saber.

Jake now had a decent weapon.