

Oracle 587

Chapter 587 - The Fourth Floor

Jake wondered if this First Faction Skill would be carried over now that Blueblood was only a subfaction of the Myrtharian Nerds, and the answer was no. The previous Faction Skills had been reset, with those of the Myrtharian Nerds taking precedence.

The good news was that Shaktilar could now choose new ones. These Faction Skills were substantially weaker than the previous ones in terms of prowess, but they were in addition to the main ones.

Each member could only join one sub-faction on top of the main faction, so this choice was not to be taken lightly. The good thing was that it was very easy to defect from one faction to another.

As Jake had once verified, becoming a subfaction made it impossible for it to become independent again. If by some miracle Shaktilar managed to free himself from his Slave Contract and left the Myrtharian Nerds, his original faction would be left behind. He did not even have the authority to dissolve it. That privilege was reserved for the Main Faction's leader.

This was a necessary precaution, since otherwise any new member would have been able to create their own subfaction within the Main Faction. Besides the obvious logistical issues this could entail, most Faction Skills only reached their full potential with a sufficient number of members, not to mention the fact that subfactions could also be leveled up.

The problem was that the number of members in these subfactions also counted towards the total amount of members in the main faction. Rationally speaking, it made more sense to focus on as few subfactions as possible.

For the moment, Jake would keep Blueblood off the hook. The Myrtharian Nerds had just over 100 members out of the 800 available spots and he didn't have to worry about those pesky details yet. Still, if there were too many of them, it would be Blueblood who would be unquestioningly discarded. To convince him otherwise, Shaktilar would have to put that work in.

Jake hadn't joined or created any sub-factions yet, but he already had an idea of the one he wanted to create. Nevertheless, that would have to wait until the end of this expedition.

Contrary to what one might have thought, Shaktilar did not feel so bad about his situation. Only a racist and narcissistic nobleman would believe that the rest of the universe thought like him. When he joined the Myrtharian Nerds he had mentally prepared himself for tyrannical Faction Skills favoring the leader and his trusted officers, but he was pleasantly surprised when he discovered the new perks.

This Myrtharian Body... It was unexpectedly good! He understood better why the mortality rate was so low among this faction's refugees. They were not playing fair in the first place.

Too bad this Myrtharian Body was not very compatible with his Blue Shyril physique and Soul Class. The cold was his friend, but this Passive Faction Skill was biased towards the opposite.

In any case, it was not a handicap either. It simply meant that he was now both cold and heat resilient. In addition, his Body Stats had more than doubled and that also included his Intelligence, Constitution and Vitality so valuable to a spellcaster.

"Now, do you intend to tell us why you were so terrified when you saw me?" Jake broke the ice first when he saw that Shaktilar had regained his sanity.

He already had an idea of the answer, but he wanted to hear it from Shyril. By remembering these bad memories, the alien started to tremble again and a painful grimace resulting from the rebound of his migraine distorted his face. Thankfully, the crisis ended quickly enough this time.

Gasping for breath and his clothes drenched in sweat, Shaktilar closed his eyes for a moment to properly choose his words, then stated gingerly,

"Because if my faction and I ended up in this state, it was because of you."

"Me?" Jake stroked his chin thoughtfully, his assumption confirmed.

"Jake?" Melkree muttered in disbelief.

"Him?!" Crunch meowed comically with a delay.

"Gobble?"

Realizing the nonsense of his statement, Shaktilar immediately corrected himself,

"Not the real you, but a carbon copy, or if I may say even better... It was a Digestor version of you. On the next floor, you'll have to fight yourself if you want to survive."

"Please elaborate." Jake invited him to continue his tale with a solemn frown.

"Sure..." Shaktilar bowed respectfully. No matter how he felt, he could not disobey an order from his Master. Gathering his thoughts, he recounted thoughtfully, "The next floor is the opposite of this one, but takes the inhospitality a notch higher. The air is hot and dry, there is no water, no atmosphere, and a blinding artificial sun shines down over us, following us wherever we go. The ground is nothing but rock, metal and lava as far as the eye can see, but paradoxically there is vegetation flourishing down there.

"In addition to the Digestors that look like you, there are also many creatures and human Digestors of various shapes and forms swarming in this hostile environment. Before, I couldn't say for sure, but now I can tell they all have your Myrtharian Bloodline. Your Bloodline seems to have an auxiliary role, giving them benefits without taking away their abilities or changing their morphology extensively. Jake Digestors, I'll call them like that for now, are like the orcs on the second floor. Rarer than the goblins, but numerous enough to come across one from time to time. The closer you get to the entrance to the lower floor, the more likely you are to run into a squad of them."

Now, Jake wasn't just frowning. He was now pulling an ugly face and his heart sank in his chest. Getting past the fourth floor was certainly impossible...

The others may not have had a clear and complete understanding of his abilities, but he did. At Rank 7 or 8, his Digestor clones would have between two and five times his Aether stats. If they fought half as well as he did, there was already reason to panic.

'Should I stop here?'

[It's up to you.] Xi didn't give her opinion this time. It was his decision to make. But it was her job not to hide anything from him. [The danger will be great, but the environment will also be favorable to you. Fighting against yourself will undoubtedly be an invaluable experience, and the loot dropped by these Digestor clones is likely to be tailored to you. You may die, it's true, but Shaktilar survived. If I were an optimist, I'd say that if he can do it, you should too. As long as you just take a look, you should be fine.]

Jake understood his Oracle AI's points, but they both knew for a fact that he wasn't exactly the cautious type. Once there, the urge to beat the crap out of his clone to prove he was the man would undoubtedly overshadow his common sense. It was the Myrmidian part of his bloodline that he couldn't disavow.

"Shaktilar, how do my clones fight? Do they fight like primitive beasts or do they have a keen sense of combat?" Jake asked out of the blue after considering several options.

Shaktilar may have said that these Digestors were his clones, but not all the goblins and orcs on the second floor looked 100% alike either. If he wasn't mistaken, the equivalent of goblins would be human Digestors with his Myrtharian Bloodline, but his flawless clones would be far less common.

The ambush on the second floor had already proven to them that these orcs and goblin Digestors could evolve by killing their own kind as well, and there was a serious possibility that some of these Jakes were even more talented than he was. Heck, they might even have skills that he, the original, didn't even have.

Shyрил's response confirmed his fears,

"I'm not sure, but the one who slaughtered my faction was the most terrifying thing I've ever seen. Half as tall as you and with an incomprehensible fighting instinct. He could use any weapon with incredible expertise and his control of matter has reached a level of finesse and precision I can only dream of."

Jake couldn't believe it, but instead of losing his courage, his curiosity found itself magnified.

'Even if I die, I absolutely must check this out in person.'

Seeing the swirl of galaxy-like lights shining in his Master's pupils, Shaktilar's shoulders sagged and his face turned pale with despair. He could see it. Jake's fighting intent rising to the sky.

'We're dead.'

[It seems your decision is made. Don't regret it.] Xi sighed without showing any surprise. She had foreseen his choice from the beginning. She lived in his head and knew his reckless and adventurous nature better than anyone else.

"By the way," Jake suddenly thought of something. "You said it was my clone that routed you, so why did we come across the corpses of your subordinates lying in the snow a few meters from here. All signs point to their death at the hands of Urul."

"That is indeed the case." Shaktilar explained with a dejected look. "Your clone killed everyone who accompanied me to the fourth floor, but not everyone had followed us down there. The third floor was already the limit for most of my subordinates and they chose to wait here for rescue.. By the time I returned alone alive from the fourth floor, Urul had already passed by."