

Oracle 600

Chapter 600 - His Reign Has Just Begun

[Aether Storage: 12.8B points.]

Turning off his triple Oracle Shield, Jake let out a weary sigh. In less than twenty seconds, he had spent almost two billion Aether points. A notorious Fourth-Ordeal Evolver like Shaktilar with his own faction hadn't even accumulated half that amount.

Staring at the bloody slurry spread over the rock with a blank face, Jake felt only deep revulsion. Although the Digestor's body had been annihilated to the last particle, the Dungeon remained true to its principles and granted him his rewards.

A portion of the corpse's Soul and Aether merged with Jake after being purified by his Aether and Soul Tribute ability. His Aether Stats rose by over 10% instantly, attesting to the extreme difficulty of the fight and acknowledging his unwavering valour. In comparison, the Aether filament compressed by his Aether Storage bracelet was not worth mentioning.

The real reward came just after. The remnants of chitin and blood that survived the disintegration merged with half of the remaining energy and two silver gauntlets streaked with lava vein solidified at his feet. The rest evaporated into the ground, returning to the Dungeon Digestor.

A quick scan told him what he wanted to know.

[Intermediate Aether Artifact: Furnace Gauntlets: Gauntlets conjured from the exoskeleton of an Elite Rank 8 Digestor. Extremely durable and able to tolerate the highest temperatures. The equipment can be tempered further with more heat and radiation and a nourishing soil. Weight: 550kg. Attributes: Strength: +5%, Constitution: +5%. Passive Skill: Accumulates heat, minerals and radiation from its environment to repair itself and evolve. Active Skill: Its user can store up to 3 Heat and/or Radiation Spells inside and release them at the appropriate time. Remaining Charges: 0/3]

Under other circumstances, Jake would have been overjoyed, but thinking back on Will's message, his face could only turn gloomy.

'If I'd had this gauntlet before I fought my clone would it have made a difference?'

Probably not. Even after winning, Jake still found it hard to believe. This monster was apparently a Rank 8 Digestor. His Aether stats should have been between 3500 and 15000 points. His Body stats were also higher than his, as was his reaction time. His technique was also superior. He should have lost.

His clone had been given plenty of chances to kill him, but miraculously he had survived each time. Jake was not so naive as to believe that it was his outstanding combat reading and reflexes that saved him.

[The Dungeon Digestor only managed to copy your Bloodline and your body, not your Soul. Your clone did not have your Soul Glyphs.] Xi shed some light on the matter in a soft, compassionate voice.

Jake nodded. If his opponent didn't have Bloodline Ignition, then that explained part of how he was able to close the gap between their stats. Even so, intuitively he felt that it should not have been enough.

Once again, his Oracle AI had an answer ready.

[You owe your life to your instincts... That's what I wish I could tell you.] She dropped the idea of consoling him. [In the Mirror Universe, instinct and luck overlap and resemble each other, one substituting for the other. The proud will think that it is instinct that guides their steps, while the humble will believe that someone or something greater than themselves is guiding them. In your case, there is no doubt that instinct alone would not have saved you. Your clone dithered too long, made too many mistakes, some of his moves were slightly off. If you have to thank anyone for being alive, it's Tim. It was his Grade 2 Luck Aether Encoding that saved you.]

Jake pondered over Xi's words for a few seconds as he closed his eyes, then gasped.

"So, I'm alive only because I was lucky." Jake laughed out loud, but inwardly he felt like crying.

[Luck is also part of your strength. If you think it's unfair, thank Tim when you get back.]

Listening to the young woman's wise words, Jake quickly regained his usual composure. He was going to need a lot of luck to save a dead man.

Kyle had also increased his Luck Aether stat to 1000 points. Perhaps by some fluke, providence had provided him with a way out. As long as his body and soul were not too badly damaged, there was still hope.

The other crucial point was that the Dungeon Digestor had not copied the distribution of their Aether stats, nor their memories. In the end, these creatures were still Digestors through and through. To evolve, they had to go through the same steps as the rest of their kind.

By killing and devouring their prey, their evolution was still horribly fast. A clone of his that was only a few days old was already mature and trained enough to outperform him in every category.

Jake could only imagine with a shiver of horror how many Evolvers and Digestors this clone had slaughtered before reaching his current level.

'It might explain why there are hardly any creatures on this floor.'

[I agree with this conjecture.] Xi assented, and then elaborated further. [This Digestor seemed to be in a hurry, as if he had to become stronger at all costs to escape a dire fate. The Digestor responsible for that roar is probably another of your clones or an even more terrible creature. It's very likely the Boss of this Floor, but it shouldn't have been so strong.]

"And I don't want to be around when their fight is over to find out. We'd better leave before Urul is defeated."

Before leaving, Jake examined the bloody pool corresponding to his clone for more loot and found two more crystal spheres. A mental scan told him they were Lvl 3 Aether Skills: Telekinesis and Earth Control.

These skills were useless to Jake, but they could be used by one of his companions. He stored them in the Faction Vault and then set off.

Shaktilar, who was shaking like a leaf after witnessing this titanic duel, didn't need to be asked to leave. The only hitch was to carefully dig up Melkree's roots without damaging the young sapling, but it turned out that they were worrying about nothing.

As Jake gently moved the earth with his powers to form a bowl enclosing the roots, the tree resumed its humanoid form and the Dryad reappeared before their eyes. Her face was pale and bloodless, but she could move normally.

"I didn't think you would win." She murmured coyly under her breath.

"Neither did I." Jake chuckled awkwardly, then declared with overwhelming confidence. "Money is power."

The aristocratic Shyril could at least agree with that statement. Just why didn't all that Aether belong to him? With enough Aether, those Oracle Skills could put the worst cheaters to shame.

It was at a level that broke all the rules and broke all fairness. While he didn't envy the Digestor's fate, it was still frustrating.

In the Mirror Universe, it wasn't just the Digestors that were to be feared. With his vicious temper, Shaktilar was wariier of his closest allies than his enemies. What would they do when B842 was one day overrun by rich warlords?

While the Shyril dragged his feet, tormented by his doubts, fears and jealousy, Melkree kept walking sagely behind Jake, until he turned around and said,

"Where I'm going, I won't be able to protect you. If you want to live, you'd better go back to the third floor. Shaktilar, your order remains the same. Keep protecting Melkree."

"But, I-" Melkree opened her mouth, but a blast of wind hit her in the face, ruffling her hair and making her cough.

When the wind passed, Jake was already far away. Contemplating the immense central volcano at the end of her line of vision, the young woman remained pensive for a few seconds, but eventually decided to listen to him. To Shaktilar's relief, the duo turned back, hastily moving away from the danger zone.

Less than a minute later, in the volcano closest to their former position, a figure covered in a nightmarish exoskeleton of silver chitin stepped heavily out of its crater. An overwhelming aura of frightening heat swirled around it, distorting the air and melting the rock at its feet with every step.

Behind the humanoid monster, a charred corpse resembling those mummies found in the rubble of Pompeii was dragged miserably along the ground, its hair tightly gripped by the creature's calloused and grayish hand.

The charred and desiccated body looked like a log about to crumble into ashes, but around its neck, a necklace set with blackened stones in the shape of water drops was clearly recognizable. This object was the only evidence needed to identify the victim.

This charred mummy without arms or legs was the once glorious and arrogant Urul Tak. After an epic duel lasting several minutes in which he had revealed the extent of his powers, used all his trump cards and even surpassed his former limits, he had still ended up in this state.

Once out of the crater, the Floor Boss raised his head toward the sky and let out a victorious roar that spread throughout his territory.

His reign had just begun.