

## Oracle 621

### [Chapter 621 - Lets Go Back Home](#)

"I wish you to still hold the same discourse when you reach my level of accomplishment." Cekt simply concluded with a shrug. "I don't think you really realize the sheer magnitude of the task."

Having said his piece, the little alien bid them farewell with a wink, his impish gaze lingering briefly over his three students before departing for good. As he vanished after touching the Yellow Cube, Jake could still hear the voice of his master repeating in his head,

'I'll contact you as soon as I finish analyzing the samples.'

With their all-powerful master finally gone, the atmosphere immediately became more relaxed. Cekt was not a bad guy, but his power and status prevented them from behaving in a completely natural way, especially for those present who were not his disciples.

The good news, for one, was that once he left, the bumps that had sprouted on Jake's skull miraculously went away. Whatever magic was preventing him from healing had been lifted with his master's departure.

Survivors and creatures from other factions or loners began to scatter, some teleporting with the Yellow Cube, others going to the nearest Oracle Pyramid where their personal cabins were, or the Oracle Pentagon where the mission halls were located to do who knows what. Some even went to the nearest Blue or Green Cube to shop or heal.

Garrow also left without a word, like the lone swordsman he was. The albino Nosk had also left without anyone noticing.

"What do we do now, boss?" Ingranus, the old spearman walked toward them, taking the initiative to ask what was bothering the other Myrtharian Nerds refugees.

Undecided, Jake gazed thoughtfully at the mismatched group of survivors, from promising recruits like Ingranus and Nicolet, to the goblin couple Xort and Niss with far more limited intellectual and physical potential.

The refugees endured his piercing and clear-sighted gaze with obvious apprehension. They were nobodies a few days earlier and thanks to him they had turned a new leaf after braving hell.

If Jake decided to leave them behind and go his own way, it would be totally understandable, and with their new mindset and skills they would be able to make a living in the Mirror Universe. For that, they would be forever grateful, even if they did get kicked out of the Myrtharian Nerds.

Yet, deep down in their hearts, they had built up a certain sense of solidarity with each other, and they didn't want to lose that fellowship, which made them bold and made their fear recede. Going it alone meant losing all that and dealing with the same insecurities, the same nagging feeling of not being able to trust anyone or anything.

Not everyone embraced the every-man-for-himself lifestyle with the same disregard as Jake. And as a matter of fact, even he had unknowingly gained companions he could count on. He was never really alone.

If these refugees were worried for all these reasons, Jake, who had recruited them, knew what was bothering them. His indecision wasn't really indecision. From the moment they had decided to take up arms and fight with him, he had already decided not to ditch them.

"Let's go home."

These three words were trivial, but they rang like a salvation to the refugees, who immediately jumped for joy.

"I knew Boss wouldn't abandon us." Xort grinned as he hugged his old goblin wife.

"Praise the boss!" Shouted a few others.

"I can't wait to discover our new base. With their skills Jake and his comrades must have their own HQ in an Oracle City like Bhuzkoc and Shaktilar!" Nicolet mused aloud, shifting the praising to another, much more down-to-earth topic.

"It can't be any worse than the Oracle Shelter I was rotting in anyway." Secyone rubbed her nose, smiling at her two sons.

Anything rather than prostitute!

Listening to the new Myrtharian Nerds fantasize about their new home, Jake and Will immediately began to sweat profusely. Swallowing hard, Jake clutched the businessman's shoulder firmly and whispered quietly, looking him straight in the eye,

"I'll leave you in charge of housing the new members."

Will paled noticeably, his upright and proud countenance drooping a few inches under the pressure of the daunting task. Seeing his crestfallen demeanor, Jake couldn't help but laugh heartily. He felt much better.

"Don't pretend I'm a monster." Jake consoled him, patting his back once in a loud smack. "You know very well that this is the best solution. You were complaining that you didn't have enough workers to build your island and launch your business plan. This should solve all your problems."

"I know, I know. It's still embarrassing." Will grumbled dully.

"It's not like I can get them to come to my Floating Island, right? You know how I train..." Jake pleaded with an apologetic tone.

Will's island had a breathable atmosphere and temperature, and at least one decent building. It wasn't enough to house all that flock of recruits, but they could set up tents in the meantime.

In comparison, Jake's island was a barren metal disk of rocks and pebbles piled high and nothing else. The two energy shields in place were only there to separate his training area from the tiny habitable outer portion. Because he always carried his Aether Sun Core with him, his Floating Island was right now about as hospitable as Pluto.

"I have my own Floating Island too." Svava offered kindly. But like Will, she had only built a rudimentary cottage there for herself.

The Nawais' masonry skills were limited to making huts and arranging caves, so her offer wasn't worth mentioning. Fumdalf was pretty much in the same situation despite his status as a Fourth-Ordeal Evolver.

Melkree had already accepted Will's invitation to join the Myrtharian Nerds, but she shamelessly admitted that she didn't have a Floating Island to her name. She was just a tree not so long ago and the notion of material possessions eluded her.

Shaktilar had been silent all this time, but when his evil master glanced at him condescendingly, he shivered inside despite his Ice Mage status, and graciously shared access to his private estates.

The Oracle City where his mansion was located was technically right below them, but neither he, Jake, nor anyone else had any intention of ever returning here. However, as a Shyril aristocrat he had more resources than his rivals.

His Floating Island was the size of Jake's, but perfectly functional. The only problem was that it was extremely far from theirs, in the space zone arbitrarily reserved for his species.

Neither Will nor Jake had needed to educate themselves on the matter, but according to Siri, teleporting a Floating Island was extremely expensive. If it wasn't too well developed, it was better to create a new one.

The problem was that only the first Floating Island was "cheap". As Xi and Jake had already personally verified, the welcome pack for the new Evolvers included shockingly low prices, but as their strength and financial capacity increased, the prices would skyrocket back to their real value.

In the case of the Floating Islands, the main metal making up their island was Oranium, an iron equivalent relatively abundant in worlds with an Aether density over 100,000. At that moment on B842, it was a resource millions of times rarer than diamond.

Checking prices, Shaktilar flatly refused to move his island closer and even Jake, who could order him to do so, didn't have the heart to force him. There was no hurry and the Shyril fortune would not be enough anyway.

The first repositioning was discounted to a round price of 1 billion Aether points, regardless of the size of their Floating Island, and Jake preferred to wait as long as possible before using it.

"Shaktilar's Island may be a solution in the meantime." Jake finally nodded. "We'll let the new members choose where they want to go."

Will gathered their group and laid out their options. Surprisingly, no one chose to go to Shaktilar's furnished island. It wasn't the palace they were hoping for, but Will's island had at least the merit of being positioned within a few kilometers of Jake's. And it couldn't be worse than the slums where they lived before.

Lucia and Gerulf were a little at a loss, but when asked their opinion they chose without hesitation to stay with Jake, despite all his attempts to talk them out of it. Gerulf was okay, but a princess like Lucia would feel out of place there.

"Don't underestimate us. I'm not a flowerpot." The blonde warrior became slightly annoyed, releasing a sliver of killing intent real enough to prick up the hairs of the nearby refugees.

Not wanting to fall out with his old friends right after their reunion, Jake capitulated.

Shaktilar was supposed to reluctantly follow his new master, but Jake didn't want him there. It was decided that he would be at Will's command, assisting him in all his projects.

The surprise guest, this time, turned out to be Melkree. As a young Dryad, she had the disposition of a tree and was only looking for a sunny patch of land and some peace and quiet. Now that she had joined the Myrtharian Nerds, the Myrtharian Body Passive had begun to alter her constitution, making her able to withstand harsher weather conditions.

In addition to Lucia, Gerulf and Melkree, Jake was of course accompanied by 15 felines, the lioness Zira having died in the Dungeon because of Hecate's spell.

After promising Syrbarun and Siri to come and visit their laboratory one of these days, Jake and his clique touched the Yellow Cube together, formally saying goodbye to this burial ground.

When a few hours later, the Black Cube was completely deserted, Citro and Cekt gone, the Evolvers and beasts far away, the Digestors that had been keeping a low profile hundreds of kilometers below came out of their burrows and started hunting, eating and proliferating again as if nothing had changed.

Weeks, months, or years later, a new Dungeon Digestor would emerge in this land and more heroes would rise up to vanquish it. Except this next time, the story might not have such a happy ending.

That was the way of life in the Mirror Universe.

A never-ending war.

### [Chapter 622 - For You](#)

A flash of light illuminated a barren disk of earth and four humanoid figures and a pack of giant felines appeared before a modestly sized Yellow Cube.

The island was as austere and desolate as ever. The planet B842 was facing the lower, non-habitable side of the metallic disk and was therefore not visible. As for the space around them, it was practically devoid of stars and galaxies. It was a genuine sidereal void desperately waiting to be filled.

His gaze drifting about, Jake surveyed his humble fiefdom with a slight embarrassment. Now that he had guests, he really could have built a decent house.

Actually, it was a good thing that Lucia and Gerulf had been proactively invited to join the Myrtharian Nerds by Will, or Lucia would probably have suffocated when she got here. Her Aether Constitution and Vitality gave her decent stamina and lungs, but the sidereal vacuum was not easy to resist if one did not know what to expect.

Lucia and Gerulf were visiting space for the first time, and even the Kintharian, who didn't really need to breathe, began to subconsciously panic when he tried to inhale air as usual. The absence of stars and moon lent a claustrophobic edge to the surroundings, and it only made them feel worse.

"Don't panic." Jake placated them apologetically, while immediately re-establishing a breathable atmosphere.

Hovering around like a house fairy, he placed his Aether Sun Core high above them in the center of the island. Daylight filtered through the first force field isolating his training area and gently illuminated their faces as the temperature soon rose.

"My apologies for that little blunder, hehe." Jake laughed nervously to get rid of his embarrassment. In terms of hospitality, one could hardly make worse host.

Curious, Gerulf sniffed the air, knelt down to pick up a handful of grey earth, which he rubbed on his hands, then closed his eyes to enjoy the touch of the fake sun's rays.

"This place is not bad." The giant grunted in contentment, recognizing this place as his new home.

Jake understood Gerulf's character as if he were his own twin brother. Seeing him relax spontaneously, he happily invited him into his training area, where the bulk of the rocks and minerals collected on B842 were piled. Because it was essentially cooled lava, these were currently forming a mono block of dark obsidian.

With or without the help of the Aether Sun Core, Jake could then alter the parameters of his Floating Island to make the temperature inside scorching and melt the rock again.

For added surprise, he let Gerulf go through the energy barrier and set the temperature at 2000°C. The cooled lava began to glow rapidly, then liquefied, becoming active magma again.

Gerulf, who was like a silly child, marveled just as Jake had imagined, swimming happily in the lava. Unfortunately, his leather clothes didn't last long inside, but thankfully, his armor was unusually resilient.

Seeing him close his eyes and breathe a sigh of pleasure, Jake let his first mentor take a well-deserved warrior's nap in front of a bewildered Melkree and a nonplussed Lucia.

Lucia was a much more demanding customer, and a lava bath was obviously not a viable solution to satisfy her.

Luckily, she showed none of her princess nature and calmly sat cross-legged in a spot that was not too dirty. The disk had only gray dirt and randomly collected rocks, so the choice was relatively limited.

Jake had indeed erected a bunker-style dwelling in a hurry, as he had a talent for it, but the place was devoid of furniture and windows. Might as well stay outside and enjoy the view.

"Do you really live here?" Lucia asked as tactfully as she could, but her frown spoke volumes about her opinion.

"I train here, so I live here. When I'm not in an Ordeal though." Jake replied laconically.

She asked a few more innocuous questions, but he could tell by her discomfort and fidgety eyes that something else was bothering her. Jake could vaguely guess what it was.

No matter how many Digestors she had killed, no matter what hell she had been through, no matter how many loved ones she had lost, it had all happened back home, in a world she understood.

The case of Lucia and Gerulf was similar to that of Svava and the other Nawais. Their technology, their customs, their religion were far too primitive to understand the intricacies of the Mirror Universe. Although magic itself did not impress her, there was something eerie and unnerving about an island floating in the cosmos.

"Come with me." Jake took her hand, yanking slightly to lift her up and coax her to follow him.

The felines and Melkree had a good idea of what he wanted to show her and followed them calmly. They walked to the edge of the disk and gesturing for her to lean over the void, Jake gave Lucia a chance to broaden her horizons.

The immense sphere with patches of heterogeneous color stared at them with all its immensity. There was green, blue, white, brown like on Earth, but also swirls with warmer or colder hues. Sometimes, there were even flashes of distant lights, also of various colors.

Studying with great interest the dumbfounded and wonderstruck face of Lucia, Jake smiled,

"It is the planet B842. This is the place where we were a few minutes ago. In terms of size, it is billions and billions of times larger than the known territory of the Myrmid Empire. Your home world is also a planet that has been assimilated by B842. If it hasn't already been, it won't be long now."

"The Myrmid Empire... is somewhere down there?" Lucia found it hard to believe. When her world had begun to be assimilated, places she knew had disappeared bit by bit without any logic.

Jake replied in the negative, but concurred with her reasoning.

"Your whole planet will merge with B842, but it will be split up randomly. The only criteria I know is the climate. Bits of planet with compatible environmental conditions tend to clump together."

To Lucia, this was a lot of information and still heavily confusing, but she tried to cram everything he was telling her into her memory. Her thin eyebrows locked in concentration, her nose wrinkled up, she tried not to miss any details.

By the time the B842 and Mirror Universe 101 lesson was over, Lucia had regained her serene and noble demeanor. When they returned to the Yellow Cube, she no longer found the place so hostile and unwelcoming.

They could finally tell each other freely about the hardships they had gone through since their separation. When Jake told her about his origins, what had happened to Earth and what he had experienced before meeting her, it shocked her deeply, but the story also stirred her soul.

His adventures after their separation shook her even more. The gruesome fate of the hero Myrmid disturbed her deeply, so much so that she refused to believe it at first. How could a near-god revered by the entire empire end up in such a dire state. The Digestors were, however, the most irrefutable evidence and she reluctantly accepted Jake's testimony.

She knew that an otherworldly agnostic like him had no reason to lie to her. It wasn't as if he were a Throsgen or Eltar Priest on an evangelical mission.

The rest of his adventures were even more outrageous, but they soon realized that the Oracle System's censorship prevented him from telling her everything. Technically, Lucia and Gerulf had not yet completed any Ordeal.

Even with an incomplete story, she could imagine the danger just by his voice. Jake told these anecdotes casually, but she could tell by his cold, watchful demeanor the impact it had on him. He laughed often, but his heart wasn't in it.

Lucia couldn't imagine how a human even more normal and helpless than she had been could have gone so far when pushed to the limit. But thinking about it in all seriousness, she laughed bitterly. Hadn't she been through the same process?

When Jake had finished, it was Lucia's turn to relate her adventures. Gerulf was done with his lava bath and he joined them smiling and completely invigorated.

"The first thing I remember after you disappeared in the temple is Gerulf knocking me out." Lucia gave the giant a brief fierce, but not resentful look before continuing. "When I woke up, Heliodas had fallen. Gerulf managed to gather the other gladiators and a handful of guards with Khazus to fight their way out of the city.

"Gerulf will be able to tell you in detail what happened at that moment because I was unconscious, but it was basically chaos. Citizens, slaves, and even pets controlled by Brain Eaters suddenly began to devour and parasitize everyone. Wives were strangling their husbands, children were devouring their mothers, it was absolute madness. People didn't know how to react, thinking of an infection or a divine curse punishing them for their impiety. The parasitized Myrmid Templars and priests didn't help matters, turning people against each other. It was carnage.

"The one thing I remember with extreme clarity, however, is the dream I had while I was unconscious. Gerulf was awake, but he also underwent a similar experience. It was as if time had stopped and a distant voice offered me a deal that I could only accept. It was as if I was hypnotized, but on the other hand I probably would have accepted even if I were perfectly lucid."

Jake had a vague idea of what she was going to say, but he was still shocked when the words came out of her mouth.

"The voice wanted my blood.. For you."

### [Chapter 623 - So What Are We Waiting For?](#)

Jake had always been suspicious, but intuitively he had fairly overestimated the Oracle's accomplishments, believing him to be truly capable of duplicating the blood and bloodline of other people. The concept of drawing blood at the source was by far the most implausible and a possibility he hardly dared to explore.

It did, however, give a much clearer understanding of the notion of "special rewards. Because they were that special.

They were outside the realm of normal rewards and had to meet specific conditions. Now Jake wondered if he would have gotten those special rewards if Lucia and Gerulf had refused to donate blood.

The princess had described a kind of hypnosis. Perhaps it was not resistable. If the Digestors hadn't invaded their planet, maybe something would have been done afterwards to erase their memories or something along those lines?

There were so many possibilities.

In reality, Jake wasn't wrong. The Oracle was more than capable of duplicating and even creating blood samples or bloodlines. Under certain circumstances, the Oracle was willing to make concessions to guarantee the rewards of its Players.

Except that the cost and effort required was not something a young Evolver could grasp. Those huge discounts were a rookie's privilege.

If Jake tried to buy a pure Myrmidian blood sample in the Oracle Store right now, he wouldn't find any in stock like he had when he checked out immediately after his First Ordeal. This was a problem that had stumped both Tim and Kyle when they had tried to improve their current bloodlines.

If Jake wanted to get it anyway, relying on the Oracle's sheer creative abilities, his entire fortune might well be at stake. It was an investment that few lone Evolvers were capable of affording.

There was a reason why a well-off Rank 3 Aetherist like Cekt would go to new players' factions to get his hands on discounted bloodlines. Grade 7 and 8 Bloodlines were not worth investing such a fortune.

It was better to collect them directly from local sellers when the chance arose. It didn't give them much choice in bloodlines, but at least the prices were affordable.

Interestingly, this was one of the few instances where the Oracle Store was actually generous. If a bloodline was of a high grade and unprecedented rarity for which there was no market, the Oracle Store was more than willing to repurchase the sample at an astronomical price. If this bloodline had never been discovered since the beginning of the Mirror Universe, it could reach unimaginable numbers.

Of course, this was all very distant and vague to Jake. Before he stumbled upon a bloodline never seen in the Mirror Universe, he would need much more than 1000 Luck Aether points.

"So my powers come directly from you. Your blood runs through my veins." Jake sighed, somewhat moved. "Should I call you big brother and little sister then?"

It was a joke of course. A bloodline transfer was not just a blood transfer. However, while a bloodline transplant was different from a standard organ transplant, his chromosomes and Aetheric Code had been modified based on that of his two friends.

Some overly generalizing loudmouths might claim that they were cousins, but only the useful part of their bloodline had been passed on. If one were to be quite frank, their genetic resemblance was just ethnic.

It was like saying they were Asian, Caucasian or African. Even though ultimately all of humanity probably had an original common ancestor, that was no reason to call anyone your cousin.

Basically, the risk of inbreeding was non-existent.



"How about me being the big sister and you being the little brother?" Lucia also joked, mischievously outbidding. "What do you think, big brother Gerulf?"

When asked for his opinion, the person concerned, who was dozing on his feet, restrained a yawn, then grunted,

"I don't care. You can call me Mommy if you want.

"Not fun." Lucia pouted, while Jake rolled his eyes with an awkward smile.

"Continue." Jake gestured Lucia to resume her story.

"Oh, ah yes, where was I... The voice. After I gave my blood, they rewarded me with a bracelet like the one you were wearing on your wrist."

Jake materialized the bracelet hidden under his skin and confirmed,

"An Oracle Device?"

"Yes, that's right." Lucia nodded as she pointed her index fingers briskly at him.

The rest was as they had briefly described it during their reunion, but with more crisp details and some surprising facts.

In addition to these Oracle Devices, Lucia and Gerulf had also been briefed on the threat they were facing, the voice asking them to protect their world as best they could while waiting for reinforcements.

What Lucia and Gerulf were hoping for as reinforcements were competent warriors. What they got instead was a forceful assimilation after the aggressive cleanup of a squad of Oracle Guardians nearly two years after Jake's disappearance.

Mercifully, the Myrmid empire had not collapsed in a day. Brain-Eaters were not regular Digestors, but variants considered a calamity even in their own category.

Once dislodged from their victim's brain, killing them was a breeze, but saving a victim parasitized by one was next to impossible. The Third Ordeal had given him a taste of the threat they posed and it was a calamitous plague.

The great strength of these Digestors was that by devouring the brain of their victim, they obtained their memories and in some ways their personality. Although their primordial instincts were not rewritten, this gave them a confounding ability to blend in.

Neither the Myrmidians, nor the Throsgenians, nor any of the natives of their primeval world had a way to correctly detect who was being controlled by the enemy. Brain-Eaters rarely blew their cover unless there was a compelling reason.

In other words, the massacres that followed were essentially wars, revolts, and insurrections that broke out all over the place at the same time. If the Digestors were pulling the strings behind these events, they were not fully responsible.

There had been many tensions between nations long before, and the sprawling, aging empire had been rotting from within for centuries. Once the pillars of its power and authority were destroyed, this chain of disasters was bound to happen.

Lucia and Gerulf had struggled for several months with a handful of survivors, facing betrayals and backstabbing from the parasitized citizens they thought they had saved. Nevertheless, for each Brain-Eater killed, they would collect some Aether and those precious experience points needed to promote their Oracle Rank.

It was enough to reach the Rank 3 of Private First Class to unlock the scan function. 110 100 experience points was enough to reach this level of authority. Even the most insignificant Rank 0 Digestors gave up between 100 and 500 xp points when they died. After several months of bloodshed and betrayal, Lucia and Gerulf had finally obtained the essential tool to identify their targets.

From that point on, protecting the survivors became an achievable dream, but only if they stayed far away from the original Brain Eater residing in Myrmid's brain.

Their coalition of survivors, made up of citizens, slaves and warriors from all nations, grew rapidly, but the slaughter never stopped in those two years and in fact only got worse.

Brain Eaters were Digestors like any other and as such grew and grew stronger just by passing the time and eating their fill. These parasites had taken hundreds of years to slowly develop and their influence on this planet had far, far exceeded that of the natives.

Whether it was humans, plants, animals or insects, there was not a single life form that escaped their control. If at the beginning Lucia and Gerulf were only fighting their own kind, their fierce resistance soon turned into a full blown fight against the whole planet.

Two years in such a position was a long time. There may have been millions, even billions of them at the beginning, but by the time they arrived on B842 there were only a few thousand.

The only two reasons why they had resisted so long were first that the really dangerous Brain Eaters had never really tried to wipe them out, and second that Lucia and Gerulf were not the only ones to have obtained an Oracle Device. A lucky few had also been granted the privilege.

Their technology was primitive, but whether they were Myrmidians, Kintharians, Throsgenians, Eltarrians, or Beskyrians, they all had a real talent for war. Citizens with diluted bloodlines were like normal humans, but the slightly purer ones were not helpless against these monsters and could even evolve quickly thanks to the pressure they put on them.

Even before unlocking the Oracle Scan, Lucia had depended on the Beskyrians, from whom Tim's Bloodline originated, to eliminate the parasitized individuals without error. Just by relying on their incredible luck, these self-sufficient warriors could take out the right targets most of the time. Their king could literally hurl an axe into the sky with his eyes closed and guarantee that it would cut through a Brain Eater and its host as it fell.

A few months earlier, their world had begun to be assimilated just like Earth not so long ago, and the constant fighting had become less intense as the Digestors became less aggressive, as if they could foresee the imminent coming of their executioner.

Then the Oracle Guardians showed up and the world was purged of these monsters. At least, they had not seen them after that. No one had witnessed this battle, all they could say for sure was that the Brain Eaters were gone after they passed.

"So, let me get this straight..." Jake repeated with a heavy heart, but not trying to hide his excitement. "If I understand correctly, you have several thousand loyal subordinates scattered across B842 right now? And these are the elite of the elite of the various folks on your planet?"

"Right." Lucia smiled meekly.

"So what are we waiting for to find them!"

### [Chapter 624 - Third Incongruity](#)

For the next few days, Jake spent all his time teleporting from one side of B842 to the other to rescue, find, and repatriate the scattered survivors of Lucia and Gerulf's army. He should have been training, preparing for his Fourth Ordeal, but this was a time-sensitive emergency.

Just as Jake had risked so much to save Kyle's sister, Lucia, who had spent two years of hardship and torment, had formed strong attachments with most of them. Even if he refused to help her, the young woman and Gerulf would have gone on a quest to save them all.

On the other hand, Jake's wholehearted help was not devoid of ulterior motives. Besides the undeniable appeal of increasing the number of subordinates in his faction, each of these survivors was the cream of the crop from his First Ordeal World.

The benefits of these rescues extended beyond that. Except for Jake, whose bloodline was pretty much functional and complete, Kyle, Sarah and Tim all suffered from growth limitations due to the impurity of their bloodlines.

Impurity could mean that the Aether in their Aetheric Code was insufficient or not compressed enough, or it could simply mean that their bloodline was incomplete. In other words, they were missing some crucial lines of code.

In the first case, if their Aetheric Code was too weak, although their bloodline would be complete, it would start from an extremely low starting point. If Jake had encountered such a problem, his bloodline would have been the same but would have been extremely nerfed, at level 0 or perhaps even lower if the Oracle System recognized such a condition.

This could have happened if the blood sample offered by Lucia and Gerulf had been a regular one. Fortunately, it was their Blood Essence. By presenting him with this gift, his two friends had been weakened for several weeks afterwards.

In the second case, an incomplete bloodline could be supplemented by other bloodlines as was the case with Jake and his hybrid bloodline, but most of the time this made the bloodline dysfunctional.

Whether it was Kyle, Sarah or Tim, they all suffered from huge limitations. It was less obvious for Sarah who had the Aether Self-Encoding Skill, but for Kyle and Tim it was crystal clear.

Without outside help, Kyle and Tim were unable to get stronger. Tim was lucky, but there was little he could do about it. Boosting their bloodline was difficult and the level-ups didn't make a huge difference.

Kyle had only reached lvl 2 of his bloodline after huge sacrifices, and he still had to purchase a higher purity blood sample.

It was too late to help Sarah and Kyle, but there was still hope for Tim. Therefore, the people Jake rescued first were the Beskyrians.

Lucia's group numbered only about thirty. She figured there must be other groups of survivors back on her planet that she didn't know about. After all, she didn't claim to know everything.

In the meantime, those thirty Beskyrians were all they had.

With Lucia convinced that they would seek her out, Jake could very well have sat back and waited patiently for these hardened warriors to come to him, but an irksome episode had made him change his mind.

Of course, there was the inherent danger of switching planets, their unfamiliarity with B842 and modern technology, but that wasn't the true reason...

"Jake! Face me if you're a man! How dare you deflower my daughter!" A deep, angry voice echoed throughout his island, forming ripples across the energy shield and shaking what little infrastructure was built so far.

Looking up above him, Jake and the other rescued survivors saw a figure enveloped in rolling scarlet flames floating angrily through space on the other side of the force field. Surprisingly, his voice carried through to them, despite the absence of air in the sidereal void.

The culprit, was a handsome middle-aged man with medium-length flame-red hair draping over his shoulders. He was relatively athletic, clean-shaven, and wore a majestic Fire Archmage robe of burgundy velvet embroidered with gold and silver threads forming patterns of flames. The individual reeked of the aristocratic arrogance of a power-loving person, but this poise was marred by a stubborn, pig-headed character.

"Damn it, not him again..." Jake's face became sunken again.

It wasn't the first time that Phirune Velseyel, Enya and Esya's father, had knocked on his door. Their first meeting was an hour after he returned to his Floating Island. Back then, Lucia had just finished telling her story and he had just decided to save her comrades.

The unexpected arrival of this lunatic had precipitated things. Jake was no slouch, but just by the overwhelming and tumultuous aura the Fire Archmage was emitting, he knew he was no match for this opponent.

Needless to say, he had denied him access to his island. The shield that came with his Floating Island was not invincible, but it was not something that any random Fire Archmage could destroy.

Enya and Esya had appeared before her Yellow Cube in a hurry, aggravated anxiety written all over their faces. Esya especially was in a daze, blushing shyly every time she met his eyes.

It was only after a concise and annoyed clarification from Enya, interspersed with their father's defiant roars, that Jake had finally understood what this was all about.

It had only cemented his resolve. Even if it was a misunderstanding, Jake had no intention of wasting his time with this "stepfather" at the moment. For all he cared, he might as well let him rant and rave here while he was busy rescuing Lucia and Gerulf's friends.

On his first rescue, Jake had even expected him to show up out of nowhere and ruin his plans, but the Fire Archmage never appeared elsewhere. However, every time he would return home, Phirune would always show up, making his rare moments of respite a grueling cacophony.

After a few trips back and forth, he even came to prefer B842 to his own island. As long as that doting father kept bugging him, he would never find rest.

Enya and Esya were particularly embarrassed, so they agreed to stand guard on his island while he was away. With their presence, Jake was also able to carry out one of his old goals: filling his Floating Island with raw materials.

Whenever Jake left the safe and secure confines of an Oracle Shelter, he would use his Earth and Metal Control along with his telekinesis to transfer absolutely anything that appealed to his greed or interest into the Faction Vault.

The two sisters, then emptied in real time the stuff stored in a dedicated area. The mountain of rocks, uprooted plants, ores and other unidentifiable detritus quickly formed a shapeless mountain strongly reminiscent of a garbage dump, but his island's 3 Oracle Constructors, who hadn't done much, could finally get to work.

To accommodate the newcomers, Jake finally put to use the immense Aether fortune amassed by Mufasa and his pack of felines. Their wealth was in the tens of billions, and it was more than enough to expand the size of his Floating Island substantially.

Each square meter used to cost 1000 Aether points, but Jake quickly realized that for every additional meter he bought, the price would increase slightly. After spending 20B, his Floating Island had only gained 8M more square meters, but the price per square meter had increased to 3000 points.

Jake didn't know how high the price would rise, but his island was now over three kilometers in diameter. That was more than enough to house a few thousand refugees if they squeezed in a little.

He could have expanded his island further, but he soon noticed that this also increased the high maintenance costs of his energy shield, breathable atmosphere and temperature. As long as it wasn't an absolute necessity, Jake preferred to take his time.

The other major change that took place on his island was the appearance of a gigantic tree in its center. Jake discovered it on his return from yet another rescue mission, and it was only after he tried to chop it down with an axe that an angry Melkree told him it was her real body.

At first, the Dryad felt a little lost and confused, out of place on this desolate island, but that changed when tons of fertile soil and rock began to pour down in a steady stream onto the island.

Only then did she realize that this place wasn't so bad. It was quiet, the Aether Sun Core provided plenty of light for her leaves, and her roots were finally getting the nutrients they needed to grow. All that was missing was a water source.

That problem was also solved over the next few days when Jake stumbled upon a lake while rescuing a group of Throsgeians lost in the jungle.

Separating and arranging the available resources was extremely simple with his Floating Island control tab and he had easily dug the equivalent of a large pool of space to dump his water in.

Melkree had found these conditions suitable for settling down. Her pinkish white trunk tree was as tall as a sequoia, but more like a willow. Its auburn leaves were shaped like a spearhead and let out a chime every time they swayed in the wind.

It was currently the only bona fide form of vegetation on his island, and there was plenty of room for a tree. Thus, Melkree's Tree became the third incongruity on his Floating Island after the Aether Sun Core and his training area.

Four days later, the rescue missions came to an end and Jake finally got the chance to take stock of his efforts.

### **Chapter 625 - Full Capacity**

Dealing with such an influx of new members was no easy task. At first, Jake was mentally prepared for it, but few of them agreed to join the Myrtharian Nerds on the spot after their rescue.

Each of Lucia and Gerulf's fellow warriors were the elite of the elite of their respective races and would not bow to just anyone, not even the friend of their beloved princess.

The positive counterpart was that there were very few casualties. Of the 2638 people to be rescued, only 19 remained missing and only 7 deaths were definitively confirmed. Hence, they had successfully rescued 2612 people.

All in all it was a great achievement, far exceeding the pessimistic goals that Jake had set for himself. This wonderfully optimistic outcome was no mere fluke.

In fact, as Jake had quickly realized when he rescued those sullen veterans, most of them would eventually have found their way to Lucia without anyone's help. Even the Beskyrians Jake thought were in danger had their own way of surviving.

They may not have possessed great Aether, Soul, or Body stats, or any way to increase them except for their Innate Luck, but they were far from helpless. Quite the opposite.

For one thing, the very place where they had appeared on B842 was almost always safe, or within a few kilometers of the nearest Oracle Shelter. Their king and his two wives had even been given the ludicrous luxury of popping up straight into the penthouse suite of a five-star hotel in Thelma.

The previous occupant, instead of being indignant and kicking them out, had spontaneously sympathized with them, absolutely delighted to make their acquaintance. Apparently, a fortune-telling technique that he practiced and that had never disappointed him until now had predicted that an opportunity would present itself if he waited here for a few days. As promised, it came in the form of these three royal Beskyrians.

The merchant had taken them on a tour of Thelma's casinos, exploiting their outrageous luck to rake in tens of millions of Aether crystals. When Jake had arrived, the merchant was already dead drunk and blubbing with happiness, refusing to let them go.

When the King of Beskyr recognized Lucia at his side, he ditched the lavish and clingy merchant like an old sock to give the young woman a warm embrace, much to the chagrin of his two wives. Fortunately, it was an act of affection devoid of lust or the latter would have made a fuss.

Jake had been sorry to end the merchant's lucky streak, but their unwanted arrival was actually a good thing. The Beskyrians' innate luck couldn't be considered illegal until they proactively used their bloodline skills. Otherwise, it would be like saying that a muscular boxer was cheating if his opponent was more frail.

So while winning a pretty penny against a few naive and tipsy gamblers or a slot machine was relatively innocent, it didn't mean that the owners of these casinos didn't have countermeasures.

Who were these businessmen and investors capable of running such establishments on Thelma? Just being rich wasn't enough to establish a business on the capital of B842. There were so many devious and underhanded abilities slipping through the cracks of the law, that those venturing into these deep waters could only be excellent swimmers.

If Jake and Lucia had arrived an hour later, the King of Beskyr would have most likely kicked a rock, coming across a croupier or gambler whose luck far surpassed his own. Even the seemingly innocuous slot machines would turn into cursed leeches, draining him of all his possessions in an instant.

Worse, by their brazen actions the king and his two wives had already been blacklisted from the capital. If they returned to gamble in any casino thinking they could make a big buck, they were in for a surprise.

The arrogance of this king was matched by his incredible luck. Although he was delighted to reunite with Lucia so soon, he had shown no gratitude to Jake, thinking he was dealing with a Kintharian hybrid.

The man had obviously not joined his faction, and Jake had wisely not made the offer to avoid unnecessary humiliation.

The remaining 39 Beskyrians had been less disrespectful, but they were loyal to their king. The predictable consequence was that none of them had joined the Myrtharian Nerds for the moment. They had settled in a little area of his island until they decided on their next plans.

The ones Jake had saved second were the Eltarians. He had never met any of them during his First Ordeal, their nation sitting far away from the Myrmid empire. Aside from Lucia, who was a Myrmidian and Eltarian hybrid, this was really his first interaction with these people.

Thankfully, the Eltarians were not as ungrateful as the Beskyrians. They had only a priestess and a templar to lead them, but their etiquette was impeccable and respectful, their demeanor calm and genial, not to say unflappably rational.

For the moment, they too had not joined the Myrtharian Nerds, but they had promised to consider his offer. They simply wanted to understand their situation before making such an important decision for their citizens.

In total, their race had 238 members.

Jake had chosen to save them after the Beskyrians because they had, with their robust minds, unparalleled cognitive abilities and telekinesis, the means to protect themselves and quickly understand their new environment. Except for the King of Beskyr and a few other elite Beskyrians, who were out of the norm, the luck of ordinary Beskyrians could not solve everything when faced with hordes of malicious Evolvers and Digestors...

For the Myrmidians, Throsgenians and Kintharians, there was no order of priority for rescue. These three races had great fighting potential and these veterans were the elite of their respective species. Jake had simply rescued them one by one under the guidance of his Shadow Guide.

Compared to the Beskyrians and Eltarrians, these three peoples had not wasted his generosity. Because Lucia was officially their princess and now the last legitimate empress, the 1345 rescued Myrmidians had immediately sworn allegiance to him, as long as they remained under the young woman's command.

To that end, Lucia had created her own subfaction after Will had told her how it worked, and she had simply named it "Myrmidian Nerds". The businessman had made subtle pleas to change her mind, but as the saying goes, "sometimes ignorance is bliss."

Her confidence in Jake's naming sense was unshakeable.

As for the Kintharians and Throsgenians, they were the two easiest customers to convince and satisfy. Gerulf was the Kintharians' idol, having long since earned their respect, but that was not the reason that convinced them to join his faction.

As much as the Myrmidians needed a cause or a paramount authority to make such a conscious decision, the Kintharians just needed a little incentive.

That incentive was the lava baths.

At this very moment, even as Jake was reflecting on the past few days, he could see hundreds of muscular, athletic men bathing in his private training area. At Gerulf's request, the area had been greatly enlarged and the temperature lowered to 800° in order to be bearable by all.

Those strongest or with the purest bloodlines bathed in the glowing lava in the center, with only their heads sticking out of the magma, while the ordinary or younger Kintharians were buried in the cooled lava closer to the edge, with only their heads sticking out as well.

His training area being located in the center of the island, Melkree's Tree was planted right next to it and Melkree, in her Dryad form, had also buried herself in the ground among all those muscular men and women, she too having only her head and her pale green hair sticking out of the ground.

From the air, it looked like a field of ripening human carrots just waiting to be plucked out. Jake's face twitched irrepressibly when he saw what his secret garden had become...

"Sigh... What am I going to do with them..." he mumbled, shaking his head dejectedly.

He absolutely had to enforce some rules! Or these unassuming barbarians would eventually get the better of his sanity...



The good thing was that he had found the perfect enticement to persuade the Throsgenians to join him. All he had to do was to provide them with their own haven.

Thus, in the north of the island, another spherical energy shield of 500 meters in diameter had been erected to set a temperature of -70°C. In the center of the circle, the temperature even dropped to -150°C.

Seeing the Throsgenians and Kintharians get their own territory, the Beskyrians and Eltarians immediately requested their own land, and Jake temporarily complied, too impatient to waste his time with these trivialities.

The Throsgenians and Kintharians had only 416 and 574 citizens respectively, so the other areas had been adjusted in proportion to their population. The Beskyrians had a circular zone of 100 meters in diameter, and the Eltarians had three times that.

The Myrmidians were free to occupy the rest of the island as they wished, but they had to keep in mind that there would be a lot of reshuffling in the weeks and months to come. To be on the safe side, they were advised to build their residences on the edge of the island, and as far away from the Cubes as possible.

Their accommodations were not the only headache Jake had to solve. For the first time since the creation of his faction, it was at full capacity.

Somewhat overwhelmed and deeply annoyed by the massive dilemma that promised to burn a new hole in his savings, Jake took another tired look at his faction's tab.

[ Number of members: 800/800]

Even if Jake wanted to, there wasn't enough room to accept everyone. With a troubled look on his face and a brow furrowed with worry, he continued to stroll around his island, muttering inwardly,

'How am I going to fit everyone in....'

## **Chapter 626 - Aether Donations**

The solution was obvious, but there was one major obstacle preventing its implementation: His poverty.

In order for his faction to accommodate more members, all he had to do was raise its rank. The Myrtharian Nerds had already reached Rank 5. To promote it to the next rank, he would need to spend 10B of Aether points and hold at least the rank of Command Sergeant Major. That was the easy part, and that amount was within his grasp.

It was what came after that left him aghast and horrified. For a rank 6 faction was not enough to hold 2724 members. In the best case scenario, he could only fit a little more than half of them.

Jake had to raise the Myrtharian Nerds to rank 7 to invite everyone. Again, the Oracle Rank of Second Lieutenant required was not a concern, but the 100B of Aether points was a horrendous chasm to cross.

'How am I going to find that much Aether?' Jake kept slurring as he surveyed his island with the strictness of a finance inspector. Distressed, he paused pensively to gaze at a stately villa under construction.

The new residents had already begun building their future homes and the grandiose Corinthian architectural style of the Myrmidians already stood out from the other races. Their technology and beliefs may have been primitive, but at least their sense of aesthetics and hygiene was not to blame.

The builders had to replace certain materials, forgoing marble for other more abundant local rocks, but the result was much the same. Some knew how to make a kind of stucco by mixing plaster and rock powder, which gave a relatively clean result.

Given the way this villa was being built, it would be a spacious palace with three floors, an inner courtyard and a garden, thermal baths and a private aqueduct connecting the complex to the water tank. It was probably the temporary residence planned for their princess Lucia.

Jake could have intervened, telling them that with New Earth's technology he could offer them much better, but he deemed that he could introduce these changes in several steps. Whether it was electricity or the Internet, these people had lived without it for thousands of years and would have no trouble doing without it for a few more months.

Out of curiosity, he strolled through the construction sites, admiring their ingenuity and resourcefulness. If this were Earth, the foundations would have been formed from steel grids cast in concrete. The external decoration, in the form of paint, bricks or whatever, would then have given the desired aesthetic to the ensemble. The construction would have been faster and more solid.

Instead, he watched in growing disbelief as a group of Myrmidians who had traded in their armor for togas argued fiercely over whether the statue at the entrance should be a lion or a wolf. He even heard his name mentioned several times. Apparently, there was a statue of him planned as well.

Hearing his name, Jake shuddered and stomped off. The other Myrmidian villas were just about as ambitious, but their layout had been well thought out. There was certainly a skilled architect behind them who coordinated all of these projects.

Even if the technology and architecture were dated, everything had been properly planned so as to establish a functional city. The roads and highways had also been thought out broadly in anticipation of future expansion.

The Eltarians, despite their innate intelligence, seemed impervious to material desires. Their people lived in communion with nature in the forest and abhorred strenuous manual labor. If it were up to them, they would simply take up residence under Melkree's tree.

Because Lucia had pressured them, Jake could see them half-heartedly assisting the Myrmidians builders with their telekinesis. Their neighborhood would be built on the same model.

The Beskyrians favored mountains and the grassy valleys between them. Although they did not have the propensity for war, nor even the talent of the Myrmidians for this art, this race remained a people of hermits and hunters living by the precept that the strong preys on the weak. Tim, who had spent 5 years with them, could confirm this.

In fact, their technology was not inferior to that of the Myrmidians, but aesthetics was completely relegated to the background. They didn't care if the color of the rocks were well matched, as long as the

end result was solid and waterproof. Even the king's palace under construction looked like the block of flats on Earth, minus the paint and glass windows.

As for the Throsgenians and Kintharians... they were far too busy chilling out to build anything. Looking at them continuing to enjoy their cryotherapy session or lava bath, Jake could not help but sigh.

'100B Aether points for this group of mismatched refugees... I don't know what I did to deserve this...'

Obviously, touring his island hadn't helped him earn any Aether point. He had just wasted an hour of his precious time. Well, not all of it.

At least it had cleared his mind and he had regained his numb pragmatism. If he couldn't raise that amount of money on his own, all he had to do was ask for help. After all, this was not just his faction. If the other members wanted to gain access to more powerful Faction Skills and gain a more prominent position, they had better be generous.

On the other hand, Jake also realized that 100B of Aether points wasn't actually that much money. If he held back on using his Purgatory, he could amass that amount in just over three months by doing absolutely nothing else.

With his Oracle Rank 13 of First Lieutenant and his 27 tons of liquid alloy, his bracelet was collecting almost 9M Aether points per day as well. It was a pittance compared to his Bronze Aether Artifact, but it was a staggering amount for Evolvers of the same rank as him. If word of this got out, the resulting waves of jealousy and envy would form a tsunami soaring to the heavens.

If he proactively decided to hunt Digestors with the felines, he could probably shorten that time drastically. Rank 7 and 8 Digestors were still extremely dangerous opponents for him, but rank 6s were no problem.

Their liter of blood still cost around 900 Aether points. Depending on the size and type of Digestors, it was possible to recoup several thousand times that amount by selling the corpse directly to an interested buyer.

If Jake came across a rank 6 horde, he could easily amass billions in a few hours. Of course, reality was rarely so kind.

In practice, a horde of Rank 6 Digestors did not yet exist naturally. The Aether density was too low. For these fearsome and relatively intelligent monsters to group together in this way, a Digestor of much higher rank and intelligence was needed to coordinate these troops.

In other words, if Jake actually encountered such a horde, the only sensible decision was to flee.

Still, with a little compromise, Jake could hunt rank 5s. The price per liter of blood was 10 times cheaper, but even if he ran into a horde, there would probably be nothing stronger than a rank 8 in charge. With the help of the felines, it was a very manageable opponent.

Although his clone was only a very powerful rank 7, Jake refused to believe that all Digestors of that level were that exceptional or the Mirror Universe would have collapsed a long time ago.

Having decided on his next plan, Jake headed for the felines, who had claimed Melkree's branches as their resting place. The Dryad enjoyed their company, so she let them be.

At the same time, he left an explicit notice in the faction communication link, calling on wealthy members to donate to help fund the Myrtharian Nerds' expansion.

While Jake expected to receive only meager donations, he was startled when a notification came in less than a minute later informing him that a large sum of Aether had just been deposited in the Faction Aether Storage. This one already contained 5B and change, but he was shocked when he saw the new amount.

[Faction Aether Storage: 31,000 498 356pts]

'Who did this?'

Apart from Mufasa and Shere Khan, there weren't many people in the faction capable of generating such an amount. Truth be told... If he was completely honest, there was only one.

'Sigmar! He didn't leave.'

Jake had almost forgotten about them, but the Players he had temporarily recruited during his Third Ordeal were still around. He hadn't heard from them since, but Will had already informed him that several of them had contacted him.

As he teleported back and forth across B842, most had already created or moved their Floating Islands near his. The black void around them was no longer utterly deserted, and several somewhat desolate metal disks were now orbiting in their field of vision.

Kewanee, Drastan and Hephais, in particular, had practically glued their Floating Islands to his, claiming to want to facilitate their interactions and strengthen their defenses.

The only one Jake hadn't heard from was the unfathomable Fluid Grandmaster Sigmar, but he had never counted on him. His generous gift came at the perfect time and caught him off guard.

As if that first gift was the start of a chain reaction, donations immediately began pouring in over the next few minutes and hours. The felines alone gave over 15B, Svava gave 4, Tim 5, and Will 11. The two sisters, Vincent and Kevin contributed comparable sums too. Even Kewanee, Hephais, Drastan and a few other members easily managed to offer a few billion Aether points.

The amount of Aether in the Faction Aether Storage skyrocketed and within hours the problem Jake thought was insoluble was solved as if it never existed.

[Do you want to upgrade your faction? Yes/No?]

Without hesitation, Jake clicked the yes button.

### **Chapter 627 - Faction Upgrade**

Jake upgraded his faction twice in a row as planned, promoting it from rank 5 to 7. He did not unlock any new faction skill slots, but his goal was still achieved.

He then approved all pending membership applications and took a look at the mental interface with all his faction's details.

[Faction Name: Myrtharian Nerds]

[ Faction level: Lv17 (Promotional conditions: 1000B Aether pts, Oracle Rank First Lieutenant or higher)]

[ Number of members: 2445/3200 (51 humans, 12 felines and 1 baby dragon)]

[Faction Aether Storage: 1 025 632 pts]

[ Aether production: 0 pts/s ]

[ Faction Skills:]

[Permanent Passive Skill lv17: Myrtharian Body (40% (30>40% or +5% per level) of the leader's capacity): Body stats boosted by 320%.]

[Faction Space Vault lv17: 640 (160>640, double with each level) cubic meters of common storage space accessible to authorized members and which can be compartmentalized into several blocks depending on the level of authorization and trust. Activation cost: 100 000 Aether pts/day.the daily cost can be shared by the faction's members. ]

[Vitality Link lv17: Allows the temporary transfer of member vitality to the Skill Activator. An injury can also be transferred to another member with its agreement. Cost: 400 000 (600 000> 400 000 or -100 000 per level) Aether points per minute.]

[United We Stand lv17: For each member present within 700 meters, Aether, Body and Soul stats will be boosted by 0.7% For each additional level, the range increases 100 meters and the boost by 0.1%. Aether Cost: 1M Aether points per minute.]

[Main Floating Island affiliate: 46]

[Subfactions: Myrtharian Scavengers, The Aristocats, Myrmidian Nerds.]

In addition to being able to accommodate everyone now, there were still almost 800 places available for prospective members to be invited. All that remained was to convince the Beskyrians and Eltarrians to join. If he succeeded, their faction would count 2724 members.

The Faction Skills had also been substantially improved.

The appeal of a larger Faction Vault was self-explanatory, while the Myrtharian Body passive and United We Stand greatly enhanced the members' fighting power.

The Myrtharian Body gave them strong and tough bodies, capable of adapting to harsh environments unsuited to human life. In short, it provided survivability and less dependence on primary resources such as organic food or water. Add to that heat and radiation tolerance and a digestive system capable of melting metal, and it was undoubtedly the most useful Faction Skill.

United We Stand was an active skill, but if Jake decided to embark on an expedition with the entire faction, he obviously wasn't afraid to splurge. With a quick mental calculation, Jake was shocked to discover that if all 2724 future members actually fought together in the effect area, their Aether stats would be boosted by 1906.8%.

For normal humans, this would theoretically allow them to match an ordinary Fourth-Ordeal Evolver. For a warrior like Jake, it could put him on par with a talented Sixth-Ordeal Evolver.

Basically, if Jake returned to the same Dungeon with all the Myrtharian Nerds responding, they could trounce all the Digestors on their way to the Fourth Floor, and they would have a fair chance against the Floor Boss.

He lost some of his elation, though, when he realized that the main caveat remained the same. The Digestors on the Fifth Floor were roughly Rank 7 or 8 and their build was rather titanic in size. Besides the fact that it was an ocean, ordinary members would have been eaten alive without being able to resist.

So, with fewer members able to advance further, the United We Stand's buff would have quickly diminished and could even turn against them if they ventured too far out of confidence.

Furthermore, it was unrealistic to expect all the members to stick together all the time anyway. If they could keep half the members together during an intense battle that would be quite an accomplishment.

The value of United We Stand was first and foremost military. It was in the hands of structured and organized regiments that this Skill Faction reached its full potential. Jake couldn't verify this, but he was pretty sure that many of the larger nations like New Earth possessed this Faction Skill.

The New Earth Government obviously couldn't invite all Earthlings into its main faction. Such a behemoth agglomerated thousands of minor and major factions, which it tried to make coexist and control with an iron fist.

Many ambitious Earthlings were like Jake, refusing to bow to anyone now that they had the power to resist. Whether they were criminals, ex-military, or normal people who had undergone a sharp personality change after a tragedy, many had risked everything to finish their Fifth, Sixth, or Seventh Ordeal early on.

Getting all these people to cooperate was no easy task. To make this possible, an all-powerful main faction was needed to enforce the law, along with an invincible leader of corresponding power.

For this reason, Jake had long been convinced that the politicians of the last twenty years were mere puppets. Whoever was in charge of New Earth was probably in the military.

I wonder what the rank of New Earth's main faction is.

[Hard to say.] Xi chimed in, interrupting his thoughts. [I think I hinted at it before, but the Fifth Ordeal's mortality rate is overwhelming. Over 90% at the very least, especially for ordinary Players. By that I mean, those who failed or barely passed their main mission in the first four Ordeals. The Sixth and Seventh Ordeals are not as dire, but there are rarely more than 20% survivors. Do your math.]

Jake addressed the problem seriously and recalled that even before he had participated in any Ordeal, there had already been a true hecatomb among the normal citizens. Many poor souls had simply never reached an Oracle Shelter alive.

There were already only 100 to 500 million Earthlings left on B842 a few days after the complete assimilation of the Earth. The proportion of people participating in the Ordeals was difficult to estimate, but many would never have the courage to attempt the Fifth Ordeal regardless.

However, even if Jake took the most optimistic figures, only 50 million Earthlings would ever complete their Fifth Ordeal, 5M their Sixth and 500,000 their Seventh.

As it was, it was more accurate to imagine that only 1-5% of the Players had the courage and determination to risk their lives for real. In the case of New Earth, this percentage could be as high as 100% for career soldiers, since they had to obey the orders of their superiors.

The problem was that there had been a lot of mutinies in the New Earth military recently. When a soldier became strong enough to take his destiny into his own hands, why would he continue to foolishly risk his life, except out of excessive patriotism.

Power gave obvious advantages to those who enjoyed it. Assets, territories, sex, there were no limits. How could a man or a woman subjected to authority all his life resist such a lure?

The harsh truth was that those who had survived their Fifth Ordeal would become even more reluctant to risk their lives in the next Ordeal, too anxious to lose the comfortable status they had worked so hard to achieve.

Of those who had survived their Fifth Ordeal, few would ever participate in their Sixth.

Jake didn't know how many soldiers there were on Earth originally, but it must have been less than 0.5% of the global population. A paltry number.

If he took these more conservative numbers and factored in these pessimistic considerations, the number of Earthlings who had already completed their Fifth Ordeal was probably no more than 100,000. As for those who had completed their Sixth, it would be nice if there were more than a few thousand.

While Jake was upgrading the faction, he kept strolling around and the Myrtharian Nerds began to appreciate the changes. Those who had just had their applications accepted were like inquisitive children marveling at their newfound physical strength. Only the Kintharians remained impassive, clearly unable to appreciate the change.

It would take a few days anyway, depending on their metabolism, for their appearance to change significantly.

"Hey, Jake, finally I find you." Lucia suddenly grabbed him by the hand as she ran into him in front of the Yellow Cube.

In a few days, the young woman had already grown half a head and her golden hair had gained some silver strands. Her body temperature had also increased significantly and although she was already athletic from her warrior background, her shoulder build had widened slightly.

"Where are you taking me?" Jake asked, somewhat caught off guard. He didn't withdraw his hand, however, letting his princess friend pull him wherever she wanted.

He was slightly uncomfortable with this intimate contact, but Lucia was outgoing enough to make the whole thing feel natural. Inwardly, he was surprised at the softness and warmth of her slender hand, which was not calloused at all as he expected from a swordswoman.

Seeming to guess his thoughts, Lucia chuckled and answered nonchalantly,

"I have some hand ointment."

"I see..."

Then they both burst out laughing. When they got serious again, Lucia explained,

"Ulfar and Asfrid have decided to give you a chance. They want to test you."

Ulfar was the king of Beskyr and Asfrid the priestess leading the Eltarrians. With a look of realization, Jake regained his composure, an icy, stern expression hardening his face.

"In that case, let them test me. Even if I disappoint them, it won't be a big loss to the Myrtharian Nerds. They're the ones who have everything to lose by showing poor judgment."

"As long as you know it." Lucia stuck out her tongue.

A few moments later, they arrived in the Beskyrian district and she let go of his hand.. A crowd was waiting for them, but to her surprise there were not only Beskyrians and Eltarrians among them.

### **Chapter 628 - Who Is Testing Who?**

Several important representatives among the Myrmidians, Kintharians and Throsgenians were there as well. There were also a few refugees and Players currently residing on Will's island. It was rare to see such a gathering at his place.

In addition to these ordinary people, Gerulf, the two sisters and even Drastan and Hephais were present.

Drastan was the great black warrior with the Versings Troll bloodline, while Hephais was the Egean assassin versed in the shadow element. Both had joined the Myrtharian Nerds during the third Ordeal, but Drastan had hesitated until the last moment before making his decision. His loyalty was more than a little shaky.

Even more puzzling, Jake also recognized the Egeans Mihangyl and Ralnor standing slightly back at Hephais' side. The Wood Archmage was already in charge of his own faction and had no apparent reason to visit him.

Ulfar and Asfrid, the two key people involved were nowhere in sight.

"Am I missing something?" Jake frowned with bafflement.

Lucia grinned as she saw him tense up.

"This is Ulfar's doing. He announced to everyone his intention to test you and Will passed the information along in an effort to get you some publicity."

"And why am I the last to know?" Jake inquired in a bad mood.

"I don't know, but Will shared the announcement in the public chat room as soon as he heard about his project..."



Pursing his lips, Jake silently scanned the chat backwards, scrolling back to the older messages and indeed found Will's ad a little higher up. The message had even been pinned and dated from the day before.

"So much for being his leader and friend..." Jake lampooned with a twitching face.

Rather than get bored waiting for the two event organizers to arrive, he took the initiative to greet Drastan, Hephais, and the other Players from the last Ordeal he hadn't seen in a few days. The Myrtharian Nerds now boasted 46 Floating Islands and the new islands filling the black void in the vicinity must belong to some of them.

"How's it going since the Third Ordeal?" Jake reached out to the news. It was only out of courtesy. From the looks of their new weapons and armor, they weren't to be pitied.

"Everything's fine." Hephais replied lamely, with a blank face. It was his trademark way of behaving when he was in a "festive" mood.

"Hmmp." Drastan grunted with a falsely displeased look. "I hadn't intended to come by and visit you so soon, but your call for a donation wiped out my savings. I had to check in person to see if my Aether was properly invested."

Jake was speechless. 'Who forced you to give away all your Aether? Are you dumb?'

"Hmm, so, are you happy with the result?"

"Very."

"Well at least I can sleep with a clear conscience. I'm not going to get murdered in my sleep by a troll hunter and a shadow assassin gone wild." Jake joked while patting their shoulder pad noisily.

Hephais flinched, barely restraining himself from drawing his dagger, but Drastan didn't seem particularly bothered by his outgoing attitude.

Just as Jake was about to annoy Mihangyl and Ralnor, while openly inquiring about the rank and number of members of their faction, he heard footsteps approaching from behind him.

One of the footsteps was vigorous and clanking because of his metal armor, while the footsteps of the second person were muffled, barely audible. Without even turning around, Jake immediately identified the two newcomers: Ulfar and Asfrid.

Wearing his most natural smile, Jake turned and calmly looked at the two individuals from head to toe. A flash of understanding crossed his eyes.

"I see." He said with detachment. "So that's where your overconfidence comes from."

Three days earlier when Jake had rescued him, the King of Beskyr was just a middle-aged man of average height. His long, braided hair and shaggy beard were reminiscent of a Viking, but his skin was tanned and burned from years of unprotected sunlight, and the last two years of fighting the Digestors had taken their toll on his glory.

Besides their good fortune, Beskyrians had no distinctive physical attributes. They lived self-sufficiently in remote mountains and valleys, but their people were mixed, with all skin colors represented. If Jake had to give a nationality to Ulfar, their leader, he would have had a hard time deciding. His eyes were slightly slanted like an Asian, but his irises were a sparkling ocean blue. His bone structure and certain facial features such as his nose and lips were more of a Caucasian, if not African descent. It was an unusual appearance, but it did not take away from his natural charisma. When he was younger, he must have been handsome.

The King of Beskyr who stood before him right now was somewhat different. He was clean-shaven, he had traded in his axe for a long white wooden bow, and his new steel armor was gleaming. It was only the surface changes.

His shaggy brown hair had turned ashen gray and his ocean blue eyes had turned orange, his round pupils replaced by vertical slits. His skin was also noticeably paler than before, almost giving him a sickly look, but given his Aether fluctuations he was clearly in great shape. Notably, despite his gray hair, he had clearly gotten younger, now looking like a man in his mid-20s.

Clearly, Ulfar had completed a few Ordeals in the last few days. Most likely, three. The gains he had made from them were not small.

Asfrid showed a similar transformation. A few days earlier, she had been a stern, exhausted woman in her late 40s, her water-clear eyes the only outward distinguishing feature of her species.

Now she too had regained most of her former youth and beauty. Her long salt and pepper hair had turned dark blue and was now silky. Their texture and consistency was now closer to that of seaweed. She still wore a loose, unadorned white dress, but two red coral-like growths formed like deer antlers on the top of her head.

Her aura hadn't changed as drastically as Ulfar's, but it had obviously become much stronger.

"Jake, I promised you that I would make my decision quickly and the day has come to render my verdict." Ulfar got straight to the point, wasting neither time greeting him nor blabbering unnecessarily.

Asfrid maintained the etiquette and elegance of her people, but her answer was as emphatic as that of the King of Beskyr.

"I was ignorant a few days ago. I'm not now." She declared, giving him a sharp look. "Your power is nothing special. I won't let you fool Lucia with your bluster."

"Asfrid!" Lucia snapped immediately upon hearing her criticize her friend, but Gerulf stopped her with a stare.

"Trust him." He growled serenely. "Look at him, he's not worried at all."

Listening to the giant, the young woman studied Jake's face meticulously and noticed that indeed, apart from his deep annoyance, there was not the slightest nervousness in his eyes. It was as if he was contemplating two clowns making a fool of themselves in front of him.

"So, what's the verdict?" Jake asked politely, deciding to play along.

"My answer is no." Ulfar stated coldly. "We will not be joining the Myrtharian Nerds."

"|-"

"No problem... And you, Asfrid, I suppose you mean the same thing? Fine, you can leave. Bye." Jake cut her off dismissively.

So what if they didn't want to join his faction? He couldn't care less.

"Don't you want to be tested?" Asfrid frowned slightly, remaining relatively calm despite her displeasure. It was the first time in ages that a stranger had shown her so little respect.

"I don't care about your test." Jake sneered. "Let's say I do your test. Then what happens? If I win, will you become good obedient lapdogs? With your temperament, I highly doubt that. And if I lose, what does it change? Absolutely nothing."

"But, you don't even know how I want to test you." Alfrid retorted with admirable self-control. Her experience as a high priestess all these years had not been in vain.

"Peeh. You're just afraid." Ulfar openly humiliated him.

A murderous glint flashed briefly in Jake's eyes, but he stifled it immediately. Turning his attention to the arrogant king of Beskyr, he scoffed with a hint of pity,

"I can understand about Asfrid actually intending to test me, but why are you still here? You gave me your answer, now get out. The Beskyrians who want to accompany you are free to follow you."

A toothy grin stretched Ulfar's face.

"Damn brat. I've changed my mind. I'm willing to test my luck against a smug pipsqueak like you."

Jake glanced at Asfrid and found the same righteous defiance. She too was dying to give him a good beating.

"So if I understand correctly, I'm not the one who's anxious about this test. It's you." Jake burst out laughing. "Come on! I'm in a generous mood today. Let me test you. If I'm satisfied, maybe I'll let you stay here."

The audience's mouths almost dropped to the floor. In just a few sentences, Jake had managed to gain the upper hand in the conversation by reversing right and wrong, becoming the one to test them.

"So, who do I test first?"

## **Chapter 629 - The Test Has Already Begun**

Jake exuded a haughty confidence, but inwardly he knew it was going to be a tough fight. A prepubescent kid with an incomplete bloodline like Tim could already curse to death a deadly Player like Ostrexora that even he had to take seriously. Ulfar was literally their king, so there was no doubt about his ability.

Asfrid worried him less, but her Spirit Body was extremely condensed. Her Aether aura was nothing special, hovering around 100 points, but her mental power was far more consolidated than his. His Spirit Body had just reached level 22 last night, but it looked as brittle as a porcelain vase next to hers.

In the end, Jake was only partially Eltarian. Although Cekt did his best, it was impossible to surpass the original bloodline.

He owed his telekinesis, the increased power of his mind, the Spiritual Trance skill and the multitasking ability to this bloodline component. His Spirit Body was also advancing faster than the other Evolvers. Only the Oracle knew what a pure Eltarian was capable of, but he would soon find out firsthand.

As Jake mentally conditioned himself for his "test," Ulfar and Asfrid exchanged an unsure look. Was it a bluff or was his cockiness justified?

Of course, they weren't really afraid. Their hesitation was mostly due to their personal pride. Asfrid felt it was beneath her to go first, feeling as though she was publicly acknowledging the fact she was taking a test instead of testing him.

Ulfar was not so convoluted. His reluctance was purely tactical. All he wanted was to let Asfrid test the kid first. Even if she failed, at least it would force him to reveal some of his tricks.

The stalemate seemed destined to drag on forever when Lucia grabbed Alfrid's hand and looked at her like an abandoned puppy.

"What difference does it make who is testing who?" She exclaimed softly. "You're not acting for yourself but for all Eltarians."

Hearing her state the obvious, the priestess was left dumbstruck, but she soon laughed bitterly.

"You're right, Lucia. Why am I getting worked up over an ego thing. I'm not Myrmidian after all. Fine, I'll let you win the verbal battle. I wanted to test your intelligence, but I guess a fight will do too."

"A test of intelligence?" Jake repeated, his curiosity suddenly aroused. This was less boorish than he'd imagined. "What kind of test?"

Alfrid sighed, showing for the first time a hint of vulnerability and emotion. "I wanted to test you through a game of strategy and cunning that we use in the Eltar Temple to train the new priestesses. It tests your intelligence, but also your power control. It also says a lot about your personality, which is ideal in this case."

Lucia opened her mouth, then closed it again, nodding her head after thinking of something. She seemed to have a good idea of what kind of game it was. Then, suddenly she shook her head again and tactfully objected,

"It's a good test, but unfair to Jake. He doesn't even know the rules while you've been playing it since the cradle. Except for the temple's head priestess matching you, you're undefeated at this game as far as I remember."

"That's why it makes it a good test in my opinion." Alfrid justified herself without the slightest embarrassment.

Jake rolled his eyes.

"So basically, if I get this right, the plan has always been for me to lose." He gave a forced laugh. "As long as my playing didn't make too bad an impression, you would have chosen to stay and my losing would have been an excuse to establish a relationship based on mutual respect."

Jake thought for a couple of seconds, ignoring all the stares, then praised,

"It wasn't a bad plan. Let's go with this test. Let's play this game. What are the rules?"

Ulfar displayed a disappointed frown as he realized he was not going to see the fight he had been expecting. A board game would not reveal anything. But according to Asfrid, it was a key process in the training of temple priestesses, so maybe he could glean something for his next fight with Jake.

The two opponents sat cross-legged across from each other a few meters apart. Asfrid asked Jake to move back a little more until they were five meters apart.

"Should I move back a little more?"

"No, this is the proper distance." The priestess replied kindly. It was hard to believe that they had been on the outs a few minutes earlier.

An old Eltarian in a threadbare robe came and reverently placed a strange rectangular tablet between them, black and smooth as ink. Given his precautions, it was a very important relic.

"What is it?" Jake raised an intrigued eyebrow.

"You'll soon find out." Asfrid smiled enigmatically.

The old Eltarian did not return to his seat afterwards. Instead, he joined seven other Eltarian men and women who positioned themselves in a hexagon around this tablet. Sitting cross-legged, they closed their eyes and Jake felt rather than he saw an amazing current of spiritual energy surging from each of them and linking their minds together.

In no time, the black tablet became the eye of an unprecedented psychic whirlwind. With their minds connected, their mental energy began to resonate and converge toward the tablet, which suddenly started to flicker feverishly. Jake then heard Asfrid's calm, relaxed voice telepathically whispering in his head,

"Link your mind to the tablet."

Feeling no hostility nor danger, Jake complied obediently. A blink of an eye later, his Floating Island had vanished, replaced by a territory hundreds of kilometers long with different biomes.

With his aerial perspective, he could easily zoom in or out and move his sight from one point to another. Whether it was animals, vegetation, fish, or other inorganic resources, he could access all their details with a single thought. There was also a minimalist mental interface that looked very much like the Oracle System.

"Where are we?"

"In the tablet." Asfrid was still calm, but her voice was now deferential. It was an instinct ingrained in her after decades of serving in the temple.

"Legend has it that Eltar created our world with this tablet. Unfortunately, this is not the original, but a copy. The original tablet kept in Eltar's great temple disappeared two years ago with the onset of the war against the Brain Eaters.

Jake didn't think much of this news. He had met the hero Myrmid. With the same status as a deserter, if Eltar was still alive he must have relocated quickly after hearing about the disaster. At least, that's what he would have done in his place.

"So how do we play?"

Asfrid then began to explain the rules to him. Jake's face became more and more bizarre as she went on. This strategy game wasn't particularly revolutionary. In fact, he had played dozens of games like this one before.

In simple terms, it was an RTS game. Two or more civilizations were warring against each other and players had to bring the ones they controlled to victory. In this world, they were like gods and had some power over its environment and population.

However, there were two major differences with these video games.

The first was that the creatures and inhabitants evolving under their eyes had an autonomy and a credible behavior nearing that of real people. On this point, the tablet was not inferior to his Bronze Aether Artefact and he already felt strong suspicions.

The second difference was that Jake and Asfrid were not just players here. They could of course directly command their troops, but they could also use their minds and even telekinesis to influence the environment.

In fact, they were more like gods.

Nevertheless, the map was large and neither Jake nor Asfrid could follow everything that happened on it in real time. Time also passed much faster, making each of their actions and decisions all the more irrevocable.

There were several playable civilizations, the Myrmidians, Beskyrians, Eltarians, Kintharians and Throsgenians. The number of playable civilizations was limited to 5, but their racial and cultural characteristics had been impeccably represented.

As the explanation went on, Jake understood why the Eltarians used this tablet for training. Properly handled, it was a comprehensive training method that could strongly stimulate their bloodline and sharpen their minds.

"Choose a civilization." Asfrid chivalrously left him the first pick for his first game.

Perhaps out of affinity, or simply because he felt their gameplay would be more to his liking, Jake chose the Kintharians. The priestess said nothing, but he detected a slight sense of surprise in her eyes.

As he expected, Asfrid decided to play the Eltarians. His gut was telling him that she had probably never played any of the other civilizations. Misplaced pride was something that afflicted not only the Myrmidians.

Once their side was selected, the map was randomly reconstructed and Jake saw before his eyes a group of nomadic Kintharians in exodus cutting their way through the forest. There were a few hundred of them and they looked completely lost.

Jake then scanned through the map in search of the Eltarians controlled by his opponent, to no avail.

"May the best man win, Jake." Asfrid said, her voice nothing more than an echo in this imaginary world.

The test had already begun.

### **Chapter 630 - I'll Make A Man Out Of You**

Once the game officially started, Jake shifted his focus to the small cohort of Kintharian nomads. With time ticking away quickly, it was only by pushing his brain to the limit that he could tenuously monitor their ventures.

He knew he was wasting time watching them, but he needed to understand this tablet's limitations. Zooming in with his mental senses, he unknowingly spied on them, studying their behavior and customs and overhearing their conversations.

The more Jake accompanied them on their journey, like a spectator detached from their reality, the more solemn he became.

Each of these nomads had a name, a personality, friends, memories, a background, and a certain level of talent. Their Bloodline also had different levels of purity and power.

The leader of this nomadic tribe was a Kintharian woman named Ruda. She was over two meters tall and almost as strong as Gerulf back then. Like all Kintharians, her mind was relatively unsophisticated, but every decision she made exuded wisdom.

In this untamed, lush jungle, there were no predators, insects, reptiles or plants that could directly threaten their lives. The weakest child in the tribe was an infant barely a year old, but he did not slow the group down.

Like all curious children his age, he had a tendency to put anything in his mouth. Jake couldn't count the number of rocks, poisonous spiders, and other toxic stuff he'd seen him swallow with no consequences other than a few stinky flatulence.

Even if Jake let these nomads roam free, under the leadership of their sage, Ruda, these Kintharians would sooner or later prosper and found a civilization. Unfortunately, he didn't have time to let nature take its course.

Because Jake had successfully detected the Eltarians' camp after a thorough and painstaking mental scan. He had first spotted a young woman filling a bucket of water near a river and then tracked her mentally back to the rest of her people.

When Jake first saw the Eltarians' situation, a cold sweat ran down his spine.

'How is this possible?!'

In the space of about a week, but only a few minutes to him, the Eltarians had not only established a settlement, but its construction was nearly complete. An aqueduct was nearly complete, a three-meter-high palisade circumscribed their territory, protecting it from all threats.

Meanwhile, his group of nomadic Kintarians were like a gang of lazy chimpanzees, too busy sleeping, foraging, or hunting to think about setting up camp. The environment posed no threat to them, and they seemed content with sleeping on rocks.

'Isn't this a little too efficient?!' Jake was alarmed when he saw each Eltarian working at 200% as if a war was about to break out.

In any group, there were always one or two slackers living off the society. The selflessness and seamless cooperation of these Eltarians was closer to that of ants in an anthill than to humans with their own consciousness and emotions.

This was not a simple racial difference. Asfrid's influence was at work behind their every move.

Jake stopped taking the test lightly, his competitive spirit frankly flaring.

Instead of going back to his tribe, Jake began to intently scrutinize some of these Eltarians, looking for any hint. They still had their personalities and nothing seemed to have changed, but all of a sudden he felt the heavy presence of Asfrid's Soul enveloping the village.

Several idle Eltarians after finishing their task abruptly showed a change of expression, as if they were both humbled and honored to receive a divine command. They then promptly went back to work, starting another task. Usually what they were doing was within their field of expertise, but not always.

The most interesting part was the children. They hadn't technically learned anything, but they were still able to contribute like the other adults, whether it was in complex masonry work, weaving or cooking.

The only difference with their older counterparts was that their movements were somewhat robotic and their gaze completely blank.

'A possession! She takes control of their minds against their will and manipulates them like puppets directly.'

Jake mind-scanned the village again and counted one, two, three, six, seven, nine, seventeen individuals with robotic movements. Asfrid was controlling seventeen people at once! The others, more capable and autonomous, were no doubt receiving their instructions by telepathy or imaging.

At the same time, Jake also became aware of the incredible "luck" that these Eltarians seemed to be enjoying. The prey was abundant, meekly drawing near to the hunters. The weather was always good, but it also rained when the water tanks needed to be filled.

Obviously, Asfrid also used her telekinesis to influence the weather. In the real world, this would have been a feat beyond the reach of either Jake or the priestess, but in this miniaturized world, their psychic abilities seemed to be enhanced greatly. It was indeed possible to perform such miracles.

"I understand now. So that's how the game should be played." Jake realized with sincere admiration towards the creator of this tablet.



It was undoubtedly the perfect tool for sharpening the mind.

"Aren't you tired of spying on me?" Asfrid quipped amiably. She had sensed his curious presence for a long time.

"If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle." Jake ranted obscurely without the slightest guilt.

"Wise words. But why do I get the feeling they're not from you?" The priestess snickered, seeing right through his bullshit.

"Whatever. I've seen what I need to see. It's time to play seriously."

As he made this bold declaration, an inexhaustible fighting intent erupted forth, setting off a hurricane in this miniature world.

"Oops. I need to better rein myself in, hehe."

His laughter echoed in Asfrid's mind as he returned to tend to his "people". Supervising these nomads again, his chuckling ceased and he became extremely stern and grave.

He had shown no signs of weakness, but the priestess was not complacent for nothing. It was not going to be easy to win.

He had just noticed another detail that was likely to be more and more critical as the game went on: time was flying by faster and faster.

It wasn't obvious at first glance, but the days were indeed going by a little faster than they had a few minutes ago. If the game went on forever, years would eventually pass in a matter of seconds.

At that point, neither he nor Asfrid would have any control over their two nations. They would then be forced to watch the two peoples battle it out in freewheeling fashion until a clear winner was decided.

In other words, the beginning of the game was the most important and he had already wasted the first few minutes.

As he watched the stupid, lazy bunch of Kintharians napping in the middle of the jungle again, all of Jake's good feelings about them evaporated. For a moment, he almost regretted his choice.

'Kintharians are still Kintharians after all. I've been too careless.'

[Individually, Kintharians are far more robust and tough than Eltarrians. Even their lifespan is longer. On the other hand, their mindset is no different than Melkree's. At heart, they think and act like trees. If their bloodline were purer, they might have simply buried themselves in a sunny clearing until they died.] Xi, who had remained passive until now, suddenly felt the urge to participate as she sensed his annoyance.

'Yeah, yeah, I know, maybe the Kintharians weren't the ideal choice for a first game.' Jake conceded honestly. "But, that doesn't mean it's hopeless. Even a slacker can get off his ass if the right carrot is

dangled under his nose. If that's not enough, I can also use force. In reality, their instincts are not totally inconsistent. If I exploit their vice well, I can easily turn the game around.'

[Then do it. Show me your wits.] Xi teased him.

'Fine. Just sit and watch. Now I shall show you how I cheat within the rules. I call this grand strategy bullying the weak.'

With the current Aether density, Jake's brain was over 300 times more powerful than a normal human'. In his Spirit state, and without his physical constraints, the Myrtharian Spirit and Soul increased his mental faculties twelvefold, turning him into a true supercomputer.

The accelerated time flow limited his prowess, as much of his attention was spent tracking what was going on down below and scouring the map, but anything Asfrid could do, he could certainly do as well.

Jake wasn't just smart. He was also a scholar. He tended to forget it, but he had a degree in cybernetics and programming. From medicine to agriculture, from steam to electronics, most sciences were interconnected by fundamental principles.

With his current memory and ability to understand, he could derive all sorts of modern technology that he had not been taught if he put his mind to it. How could an admittedly intelligent but ignorant priestess like Asfrid compete?

"One two, one two. This is your supreme god Jake talking to you. Come on, you wankers, it's time to get to work!" Jake mentally bellowed into the heads of all the Kintharians, who jerked in terror upon hearing him.

The ones who were gorging themselves spat out their fruit, the yearling involuntarily swallowed the rock he was sucking on, and the oldest suffered a mini stroke.

'Now that's more like it.' Jake nodded inwardly in satisfaction.. 'You're a bunch of losers now, but I'll make a man out of you.'