

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 267 – Intruders

Increasingly depressed, the child had to resolve to watch the two adults become stronger by the hour while his abilities had not changed one iota. Only his Aether of Luck could still be improved, but the number of Aether points required to increase it by a single point was staggering and exponentially increasing. Before, to increase this Aether stat by one point, he only needed 100 Aether points, but to increase from 29 to 30 it had taken him almost 1000.

In principle it was similar to using a higher grade encoding, except that the quality of his Aether had not changed. The 100-point barrier had not yet been reached, but the amount of Aether required for each additional point was increasing substantially. Luck was a mysterious field that did not obey conventional rules.

Unlike other types of Aether, they were unable to perceive the Aether of Luck, and this one had no virtual color to facilitate its observation. It was an abstract and impalpable notion and he had no idea how this Aether worked, nor where this Aether was stored.

Nevertheless, his luck was the only factor that Tim could influence, and fatally he had no choice but to stake all of his Aether on it. His only wish was to remain alive until the day it would live up to his expectations.

Ignorant of Tim's plight, on the seventh day of their collaboration, Jake and Sarah were on the contrary in a joyful mood. After an embarrassing week, they had finally been able to make themselves a decent leather armor and were coming back from their first expedition dressed with style.

The trio had become accustomed to traveling barefoot during this Ordeal and regaining the comfort of footwear was a memorable experience. No more splinters, no more accidental cuts and no more risk of being accidentally bitten or stung by an insect or reptile.

Neither Sarah nor Jake was an expert costumer and they had butchered a good part of their leather stock before they got the hang of it. If their intelligence and dexterity had been the same as when they were human a few months earlier, they would never have been able to sew these armors so quickly and certainly not so elegantly.

The end result was admirable and after making the first one, weaving or sewing other garments became much easier. With their leather armors, belts, boots, knife gear, and animal skin backpacks, they looked like a group of rangers. Sarah had even made herself a bow and arrows which she was still learning to use.

At that very moment, Jake was dragging the corpse of a woolly rhinoceros that had just decided to climb down from its mountain, while Tim and Sarah were carrying a huge wicker basket full of fruit. With their relaxed laughter and expressions one would have thought they were a happy family out picking mushrooms, except that they were covered in blood from head to boots.

As they chatted on their way home, the air they exhaled would form a distinct smoke, reflecting the fact that the temperature had dropped drastically over the past week. At first, they had decided to make clothes for the sake of decency and dignity, but they were now very happy with their decision.

At the rate the temperatures were plummeting, they would probably turn negative in the next three or four days. The sun was also no longer visible and for the past two days thick storm clouds had been gathering over them. Those who had not secured for themselves a shelter or a place to keep warm might soon face a real crisis.

Over the course of the week, the trio had coldly watched the number of candidates gradually dwindle. Of the 7000 or so participants present at Jake's arrival, there were now only 5900 left.

The points of the top 10 Players had continued to accumulate over the first few days, as had their number of kills, but this trend had eventually leveled off. It seemed that the less talented participants had finally been eliminated and those still in the running were no longer such easy prey.

The other more likely possibility, however, was that the rapidly changing climate had alarmed these war-mongering participants and their priorities had changed.

The trio also had no news of Will and the two sisters. Tim had repeatedly offered to go look for them, but the location of the nerd changed frequently and the two sisters were too far away from them. These three, although separated, were in the center of the island, if not on the other side. A distance impossible to cover in a single day.

Will's points were climbing incredibly fast and he had even overtaken Jake, moving up to 47th place. Jake and Sarah wondered how the businessman had managed this feat, but remembering that he was their ally, they could not help but feel reassured.

As for the two sisters, their position in the rankings had stagnated for the first half of the week before suddenly skyrocketing. The trio had no idea how they were able to pull off this feat. As resourceful as Will was, the two noble women had never seemed to be very resourceful. The fact that they had reached the third trial had already been a huge surprise for Jake.

Lfou ar ovu fdouzrmr, ovuw lfj ovu vaiilatu jvuzu ovuaz gflu jfl vattur frt nahcut pn ovu nfhu. Mufjrjvaiu, ovu himptl vft opzrut ezuw-gifhc frt ovu zpQgiu md ovprtuz vft guepr om zulmprt. Tvu gzfrhvul frt iufsul md ovu

huropzw-mit ozuul fzmprt ovuQ vft guepr om gurt frt vpQ prtuz ovu dmzhu md ovu jart, laerfiare ovu prnzuhuturout nmjuz md ovu fnnzmfhvare lomzQ.

‘I am not feeling good about this storm. ‘Tim said apprehensively, staring at the threatening black clouds. Coming from someone with a keen sense of danger and uncommon good fortune, it was a comment to be taken seriously.

Sarah frowned as she thought of something, but she shook her head to chase away the wild idea. The possibility that this storm was artificially created by the organizers of the trial was inherently terrifying.

Moments later, they finally arrived at the foot of the hillside where their base was hidden and began to check if the traps were still in place. After a quick glance, their relaxed muscles suddenly stiffened into a state of heightened alertness. Drawing out their respective machete, gladius, and axe, the trio glanced at each other with a grim expression.

Their Aether Intelligence being high enough to employ telepathy, Jake grunted mentally with some tension in his voice,

‘ Someone is there.’

Nodding her head, Sarah knelt down a few meters away to inspect the ground and confirmed telepathically with a serious expression,

‘There are two of them.’

‘At least two. ‘Jake interjected. ‘If their allies fly or can move underground like me, they could be a lot more.’

Jake did not mention that the probability was still low, but since he could do it, they would be wrong to ignore this possibility. Still, if these newcomers thought they could sleep for free in their humble abode without paying rent, they would bitterly regret it ...

Tvu ozfnl ovfo ovu ozam vft luo pn mpolatu juzu bplo f dfhftu. Tvu zufi tufov xmru jfl ovu vmplu aoluid. Tvu vmplu jfl tulaerut fl f ovzuu-taQurlamrfi npxxiu, ufhv gzahc vfsare f tadduzuro lvfnu dmzQare f cart md hmQniuk imhc vmitare ovu lozphopzu ar nifhu.

To a stranger unfamiliar with the place, the stone building seemed to be built in one piece, but the truth was that there were many projectiles inserted in the interstices, even in the bricks themselves. This architectural marvel was only possible thanks to Jake's high intelligence and his fine earth manipulation skills that had improved considerably over the past week.

With one thought, Jake could at any time encompass the house with his Spirit Body and take control of all these projectiles to turn intruders into a ball of needles. Better yet, if the intruder was able to spot these projectiles and take control of them, he could simply collapse the building.

A complex combination of movements held the structure in place that Jake had memorized in advance. By creating this sequence, he had made sure that even an individual smarter than himself would not have a chance to solve the puzzle quickly.

In the worst case scenario, a psychist scanning the walls and ceiling with his Extrasensory Perception would have simply thought that there was a harmless hole in the middle of the layer of stone constituting the ceiling. Even if he discovered that the neighboring bricks were in fact movable, finding the 'solution' would literally be suicide. It would be like removing the keystone holding the entire building in place.

Sarah and Tim were well aware of this, as they had discussed it at length with each other before they devised the process. Fearlessly, the trio silently levitated to the clearing, allowing themselves to be lifted by Jake's telekinesis, and when they landed in the clearing, anxious voices echoed from inside the house.

