

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 278 – Familiar Footprints

In the end, the day's hunt ended without a hitch under the persistent flirting of his cousin Kevin trying in vain to seduce the two ladies. After having felled the snake, Jake had resolutely used it as a whip on his cousin to let off some steam. Even in human form, he could endure Quite the beating.

Nevertheless, Lu Yan's excellent observational skills were to be commended. She never failed to notice Jake's mood swings and would always get away in time to avoid being targeted unnecessarily. Sarah also knew when to stop and offer a helping hand. Only his cousin didn't seem to be able to, or maybe he was doing it on purpose?

It didn't matter. Beating up his cousin was also salutary for Jake, and granting his dear cousin's wish was not at all a concern for him. Of course, no wound was really disabling or lasting, and he was careful never to forget his surroundings in case of an enemy ambush.

For the next two weeks, the group carried on training, hunting, exploring the island, or fulfilling challenges. Lily had also come out of her coma, but as Jake feared, she had not escaped unscathed. The left side of her face as well as her entire arm was paralyzed. No matter how many days passed after her waking dream, it made no difference.

Combined with the news that her father Daniel had been eliminated from the Ordeal, the little girl had broken down in tears and Tim had volunteered to console her, eventually reaping a couple of slaps. Jake had no comforting words for her as he only knew this uncle by reputation.

To heal Lily, Kevin had offered to bite her. His Werebear bloodline allowed him to form his own pack by infecting other humans with his bite, and they would share a fraction of their Aether and Body Stats with him thanks to his Alpha status.

Tragically, Lily vehemently refused, preferring to remain, in her words, ‘crippled for life, rather than look like a hideous, hairy monster’. The girl’s resolute tone was so full of sincerity that it had the effect of an arrow on Kevin, piercing his ego right through his heart. It had taken a few days for him to recover and the silence that had ensued had been a great boon to all of them. Especially Jake.

Regardless, everyone had quickly come to terms with Lily’s paralysis, the stupidity of the Ziwid and Kevin’s cheap jokes. After a few days hunting together and the base consolidated, they had been able to start hunting and exploring separately to accomplish the feats and quests of their choice.

To avoid unpleasant surprises, Jake had required that Lu Yan stay with him at all times. She had naturally been reluctant, but burying her in the bedrock for a few hours had been enough to change her mind.

At that very moment, approximately fifteen days after the storm, Jake and Lu Yan were exploring an unexplored section of the island together. It had been about two days since they had left the camp and they were now more than 500km far from their base.

Such a distance was not so easy to cover, even with their stats, because of the treacherous environment and the predators swarming in this jungle. To get here, they had to spill tons of blood, massacring their way to where they were.

Right now, in front of a frowning Jake and a sweaty Lu Yan stood a mountain, or rather a volcano. And this volcano was active. After performing all sorts of Auxiliary Exploits and killing many monsters that had rewarded

him with an additional million Aether points, he had concluded that this was not enough for him. 200 thousands additional points were from Lu Yan.

His Aether stats were currently as follows:

[Oracle Rank 5, Sergeant [15,43M/ 100M], Aether Storage: 3 159 386pts]

[AETHER STATUS:]

Strength(S): 202.6 points]

[Agility(A): 199.6 points]

[Cmrloapoamr(C): 186 nmarol]

[Vitality(V): 188 points]

[Intelligence(I): 216.3 points]

[Perception(P): 214.2 points]

[Extrasensory Perception(EP): 212.4 points]

Since he had passed the 180-point mark, his progress had begun to decelerate, until slowing to a crawl. Small carnivores, sea monsters and other mammals were no longer demanding any effort from him and this was reflected in the improvement of his stats. Without challenge or difficulty, his Myrtharian bloodline could not be stimulated.

Apart from finding stronger opponents or slaughtering thousands of creatures to gain an extra Aether stat point, there was not much else he could do. Only his mental stats were still being challenged thanks to his constant vigilance, the creation of his Aether Core, and the study of the manuals on Aether and the genetics of the Mirror Universe.

Even after two weeks, he was far from fully understanding these two books. They had practically been memorized by rote, but deriving concrete applications from them was not so simple, if not impossible for the moment.

Concerning the Aether for example, the primordial Aetheric Rune was the 'point'. By abruptly condensing a large Aether mass, it was possible to create an Aetheric singularity causing physically observable effects on the real world. A kind of energy spark at the base of all Aether skills and spells.

To his knowledge all spells, be it his telekinesis or the fireballs of the two sisters started with such a rune, but the process was automated thanks to the corresponding Aetheric Code. If he could create this single rune, he would no longer be so helpless.

Tval jfl film ovu Quovmt plut om hzufou fr Auovuz Cmzu. Irlouft md hzufoare f dpeaoasu lnfzc md uruzew, ovu Auovuz vft om gu hmQnzullut Qmzu frt Qmzu lofgiw proai ovuzu jfl urmpev Auovuz om euruzfou fr Auovuzah ezfsaow dauit. Hu vft guur ozware om hzufou val Auovuz Cmzu dmz fiQmlo f Qmrov rmj, frt vu jfl suzw himlu om ovu emfi.

Although he wasn't successful yet, these efforts had many directly observable benefits. His Spirit Body had reached Level 6 and his mental Aether stats had continued to progress decently despite the stagnation of his physical stats. His telekinesis was stronger than ever and with the assistance of the Green Soul Stone, he was able to generate a protective force field around him almost permanently.

If he came across the Nosk from two weeks ago in a similar storm, he was confident that he would be able to endure the alien's killing intent without faltering, and then behead him along with his armor in two or three blows.

Further killing of weak monsters was useless and inefficient with his current Aether stats, but not so with his Body stats. Since they have hardly changed since the beginning of the Ordeal and were not originally so high, if he could improve them just a little, his fighting strength would increase substantially.

This was the reason he had undertaken this journey and the reason he was standing in front of this volcano. He wanted to temper his body the Kintharian way. Since the Kintharians lived on a volcanic telluric planet very close to their star, he needed a similar environment to stimulate that bloodline. And for that, what better than an active volcano?

Alas, this volcano was not so easy to climb. It occupied a vast space at the edge of the snowy mountain range in the center of the island. Regularly, lava jets were ejected from its crater and all traces of vegetation for kilometers around had long since been charred.

The air was polluted and smoke-laden, while the temperatures were unbearable, which explained the abundant perspiration dripping from Lu Yan's body. If Jake hadn't forced her to come, she would never have set foot on this part of the island. Besides, there were no Players in the area apart from them.

Walking for the first time on the ash surrounding the volcano, Jake paused for a while. There were deep footprints in the charred ground in front of them and they were eerily familiar to him. If his memory did not deceive him, they were the same as those of the humanoid monster with obsidian skin that he had met during his second trial.

Since he had arrived on the real island, he had never encountered such a monster again. Only Tim had once encountered such a creature when he had had to flee his first hideout, but this one was considerably smaller. On the real island, these monsters seemed to be quite rare.

'He is not alone...' Lu Yan commented with some trepidation in her voice. Seeing Jake's worried expression, she was glad to have him by her side for once.

Ignoring the young woman's remark, Jake set off towards the volcano again, but with more caution. Spreading his Spirit Body out over a radius of about 30 meters so that no movement would escape him, he began to levitate a few

centimeters off the ground to muffle the sound of his footsteps. Lu Yan did the same, but it demanded much more effort. A few minutes was her limit.

Fifteen minutes later, Jake stopped again and discovered new footprints, but this time his face was livid. Lu Yan, who couldn't stand the silence, couldn't help but exclaim telepathically,

‘ This one is much bigger. Do we really have to take all these precautions ?‘

‘We must. ‘Jake replied seriously, catching her almost off guard. It was rare that he addressed her without contempt.

‘What is the risk compared to the Nosk of two weeks ago ? ‘She worried when she saw that this tyrannical antisocial was willing to talk.

‘The one I met during the second trial was about ten meters high and I only passed that trial by stealing the Green Soul Stone from his neck. In a fair fight, I would certainly have died in a few seconds. It was by ambushing him and fleeing underground that I managed to steal the stone from him.

‘Based on the footprints in front of us, this one is twenty meters high at the very least. Except in case of miracles... I don't think any Players on this island have the slightest chance.‘