

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 266 – Base of Operations

Over the next few days, the trio strove to create a proper operating base. With Tim discreetly using his Innate Luck Skill to help them find a NaeQuat-rich natural haven, finding a safe and conveniently located place to operate had been a breeze. By daybreak after a few hours of walking, their new base had been established.

It was a clearing comparable to the ones Tim had discovered earlier, but it was larger, about the size of a basketball court and located slightly higher up on a hillside. It was an ideal hideout and was also concealed by huge trees whose foliage shielded them from aerial predators.

Tim had been quite bitter to discover this place so late. Because if he had found this refuge earlier, he would never have ended up in such a predicament. As for Jake and Sarah, they had not been impressed at all, even complaining about the lack of sunshine.

Everything else was just the application of the survival principles they knew about to make the clothes and tools they needed. Jake already had this knowledge since the Oracle System had forced him to swallow all sorts of books on the subject and for what he didn't know, he could simply make the proper wish by referring to his Shadow Guide.

Jake thought he had a lot of Aether with his almost 800,000 points, but he had soon realized that the rewards of the previous events were nothing more and nothing less than the salary financing their operating costs on the island. Each plant, flower, tree and rock had its own qualities and in hopes of

fulfilling the exploration challenges of a Herbalist, Biologist or Geologist, they had been compelled to overuse the Scan of their bracelet.

Several tens of thousands of Aether points had been squandered for these simple actions and what they had discovered represented only a fraction of the island's wildlife and flora. Yet, it was not useless. The Logbook function that Jake had almost forgotten had the merit of keeping every piece of information concerning him in a kind of huge Virtual Library and this information could be accessed with a simple thought.

With his current Intelligence, though, it was seldom necessary for him to re-read any data. Everything he learnt was kept fresh in his mind and the mastery and understanding that came with learning was so crystal clear that he felt as if he had known these things all his life.

Similarly, when he first undertook to craft leather for the first time, he had realized that he was perfectly familiar with the process, although he had only vaguely read an excerpt from a book on the subject.

Tim and Sarah were not to be outdone, as their Intelligence had also reached 100 Aether points. Just by seeing Jake operate and listening to his explanations, it was extremely easy for them to imitate him and take their own initiatives.

However, there was one task that was completely dependent on Jake and that was the making of their working tools. Needles, vats, cutlery, pieces of armor, small pieces of furniture, bricks or even an oven and forge. Jake's power was a miraculous shortcut to all these steps that could save them days in a few minutes.

For example, without a needle, the leather and clothing they wanted to make would have been extremely difficult to sew into a usable form. Starting from scratch, they probably would have had to use bone, wood or stone to achieve an uncertain result, but with Jake's powers it was that simple.

His telekinesis was worth any mold and he could forge any object, as long as it was not too small or the pressure and heat required was not too high. If the final result was fragile, he could always consolidate it with the Grey Aether.

As for his magic of earth and heat, it saved them a lot of hassle by providing the raw material for most everyday objects. It was not only useful for making or forging objects, but also for detecting underground threats and analyzing the subsoil in depth.

Once the routine had been set up, their base had taken shape in no time at all, and after a week the trio no longer looked like cromagnons. The raptor corpses had provided them with the scale- and feather-covered skins they needed and after skinning them, removing all traces of residual flesh, the leather manufacturing had begun.

Jake had made a vat with his earth control that he had filled with sea water and then boiled to collect enough salt. The hides had then been salted for a full day to ensure their preservation, since they had too much of them for immediate use.

The next day they had been soaked for a few hours to remove dirt and other impurities and then scraped properly on a specially made stone table. For this Jake had to make suitable serrated knives, but the final result had been convincing given that this was his first time.

Tvu vatul vft ovur guur zarlut frt tzaut frt ovu lhfiul dzmq lmqu md ovu vatul vft guur lhzfnut mdd ar opzr om easu ovuq f ezufouz sfzauow md hvmahul. Tvu ofrrare vft guur tmru tazuhoiw gw gmaiare ovu gzfarl md ovu suimhazfnomzl frt vft zuypazut lusuzfi tfwl md zulo, rmo om quroamr ovu darfi lhzfnare jvuzu ovu lquii md ovu tuhmqnmlare zulatpfi gzfarl vft guur f zufi oulo dmz ovuaz lurly md lquii. Sfvzfv vft usur smqaout ojahu fl ompev fl lvu télizèt om gu.

As long as the process may have seemed, it actually required very little attention. Aside from the daily need to soften the hides, which Jake could do

with a few telekinetic movements, they had been free to go about their business the rest of the time, and some steps had even been useful outside of the leather making process.

Tim, who had only managed to hydrate himself by sucking on the juice or blood of whatever fruits or animals on the island, had discovered with wonder that it was ridiculously simple to get drinking water from seawater. When Jake was boiling the sea water in his tank, he had simply placed a sloping vent leading to another tank and the condensing steam had simply trickled down into the second tank.

A single action had provided them with salt and drinking water, eliminating one of the major threats to their medium-term survival. By salting and smoking the meat, the problem of food had also been solved and with his abilities, they had not made it difficult for Jake to build an underground cellar.

The rest of the time, the group had worked hard to build a proper fortress and although the end result was relatively modest, a three-room stone house in the middle of the jungle could be considered an incredible accomplishment.

Most of the credit went to Jake and his Aether Skills, which were particularly well suited to make him a builder, but the Sanctuary Bubble had considered this a common achievement. All had received a notification from their System informing them that the 'Builder: Stone Age (Gold)' feat had been completed, rewarding them with 100,000 Aether points.

The house may have been nice, but it was nothing more and nothing less than Jake melting and shaping the surrounding rock and earth. He'd made so many bricks that he'd stopped counting them, but he knew that this accomplishment posed no threat to a Player yearning for his death.

It was for this reason that they had set all kinds of traps all around their camp. It wasn't enough to neutralize an Oracle device user, but the sheer numbers of

traps could easily cause a Player to make a mistake if he was even the slightest bit careless. Even the trio who had set them down had almost fallen into them several times.

But all these precautions would never be able to stand up to absolute might, and that's why they had also given a lot of emphasis to hunting and training. Making use of the 'Mapping' function of their bracelets, the trio had explored more than a hundred kilometers around and never separated from each other by more than a few meters. Even to relieve themselves, Jake always had to be present nearby to stand guard and vice versa.

This was to prevent the risk of being ambushed by a participant capable of evading the calculations of their Oracle Paths. Taking part in all this exploration, they had managed to map everything that could be mapped and had been able to use this knowledge to hunt freely.

They had soon realized that the Players were not the worst threat on the island. There were 'Monster Bosses' reigning in all regions of the island and ocean, each jealously guarding their territory. The sea monster that had attacked Jake was one of them, while the triceratops bull was another.

Since then they had discovered a few others and had learned to avoid them at all costs. The trio had also discovered an entire village of the charcoal-colored humanoid creatures that Jake had faced in his second trial, and they had only managed to survive by retreating swiftly.

Other than that, and with a few precautions, surviving on the island's outskirts hadn't been that difficult. As long as they did not venture to the high plateaus and mountains deep in the heart of the island and avoided these tyrannical and dominating Bosses, hunting was not complicated.

Jake and Sarah's Aether stats had progressed well over the week, their confidence growing with each victory. Alas, Tim couldn't say the same, as his bloodline was devoid of the Self-Encoding skill, he could only bring himself to look at his useless Aether stock in despair.

