

Oracle 651

Chapter 651 - Lodunvals

"Hic! Em, sir! Hic! Ima talk'n to ya, hic!" A tipsy guy barked as he teetered in front of them to block their path.

The man in his forties had only an old spear in his left hand, which he was using as a crutch to keep his balance. In his right hand, he had an equally shabby dagger aimed straight at them that he surely thought was threatening.

If his face wasn't puffy and purplish, his eyes glassy and his breath didn't reek of absinthe and carrion, then perhaps his attempt at intimidation might have worked. If it had been just Trash, he would have had his chances, but today really wasn't his day.

This kind of lousy scum was the eighth or ninth one they had encountered since leaving the Wilderness. After stepping into civilized lands, the monsters had been replaced by bandits and misfits.

Instead of answering him, Jake mentally scanned the area with his mental sense and found, as he expected, another group of armed drunkards camping around a fire in a ruined house. The troublemaker had noticed them by chance while going to pee the little water he had left in his body.

"Godamit! Hic, ya hear me?! Give your gold, or, or... hic, you'll regret it!" The bandit hiccupped as he revealed an incomplete row of yellowish stumps.

Jake rolled his eyes in exasperation. Glaring at Trash, the teenager understood his intention and flashed yet another apologetic smile. It was because of him that they were running into all those jerks.

When he was roaming with his gang, with their numbers and equipment they didn't have to fear this dregs of humanity. Jake had let him lead the way, but all they did was run into a string of bad apples. If he had kept his giant size, these mercenaries would have thought twice before messing with him, but now that he looked like a handsome young man he had to deal with other inconveniences.

If that was all, Jake could have simply killed them with a single thought, but they were in the territory of the great self-governing city of Lodunvals. As loathsome and abhorrent as these mercenaries were, they had apparently been conscripted here to defend the empire from the monster hordes. As long as they performed their duty during the day, the authorities would turn a blind eye to their crimes, counting them simply as victims of monsters.

The logic behind it was simple: No non-volunteer woman, man or child was supposed to loiter in these abandoned and wrecked villages.

If they weren't members of an adventuring group, the army or powerful heroes, then they were local villagers who had refused to evacuate when the order was given or outlaws without an ID. From Lodunvals' point of view, they were already considered dead.

Fortunately, or rather unfortunately, Jake found no one to save from their clutches here, nor did he find any suspicious stench besides that of sweat and grime. If the duo were not their first targets, then they were already long dead.

"B-bastard! Since ya don't want to give up yer money, ye don't have to be nice, hic!" The mercenary yelled frantically as he ground the air with his menacing dagger. "And ya kid, hic! Ya can keep the captain warm at night!"

To prove his words with his actions, he wildly threw his spear at them, but he was clearly far too drunk as the projectile flew high over their heads. Jake and Trash followed the parabolic trajectory with a pitying look.

It should have been a wake-up call for the drunk, but not content with being shamefully inaccurate, he let out a screeching cry of rage and charged as he wobbled from left to right, even stumbling a few times before coming up short in front of them.

If the bandit had stuck to racketeering, Jake would have spared him like the previous offenders after knocking him unconscious, but his last words washed away his last qualms.

A Soul Beam burst from Jake's pupils and pierced the drunk's forehead, obliterating his consciousness and soul in the process. In the split second before his death, Jake tortured his mind for the names of his captain and the other unpardonable criminals, then delivering his judgment, the heads of the six identified bandits exploded loudly, spraying the other drunken and terror-stricken mercenaries with brain juice.

Screams of horror echoed through the abandoned house as Jake and the teenager headed off again. Trash stood stunned for a brief moment, his gaze locked on the distorted, horrified grimace of their attacker, but he pulled himself together and trotted hurriedly behind Jake to catch up.

He was stupid, not naive. He knew what kind of unenviable fate awaited him if he fell into the hands of the wrong people. A healthy boy with all his teeth like him wasn't something you'd find on many battlefields.

"I thought Lodunvals was safer than this. If you hadn't told me this town had an excellent reputation, I never would have believed it." Jake pursed his lips dismissively.

"Ahem... Compared to Laudarkvik, it is indeed..." The boy coughed embarrassedly.

After that, he didn't try to convince Jake anymore to spare them for the sake of the law. Jake didn't hesitate either. Anyone who had the audacity or foolishness to mess with them would join their maker in the afterlife.

Anyway... Jake had just remembered that the natives of this world did not believe in an afterlife. Still, on the way they saved several dozen people. Some of the families who had not been molested were grateful to them, but they refused to travel with them to Lodunvals.

Lodunvals was closer to them than Laudarkvik and on the path to the latter. Trash had his few friends there and he had to inform the families of his gang's dead mercenaries. That was the only reason Jake had agreed to drop in there in the first place. His intuition, or his luck, told him that it wouldn't be as convenient to get his papers once he got there.

When dealing with the government, it was best that the guards and officers in charge were not blatantly corrupt.

At last, after traveling a few dozen more kilometers, pushing deeper into the lands of Icarden, they encountered their first proper patrol.

Twenty horsemen in gleaming, glittering steel plate armor and streaked with bronze linings that gave them a certain swagger. They all wore barbut helmets that made it easy to distinguish their eyes and the middle and lower portions of their faces, except for the lead rider who wore a morion helmet, more akin to a steel hat with a crest of red feathers decorating its top.

From that point on, they had no trouble. In exchange, they were checked numerous times and Jake, who did not have his ID card, was kindly but firmly invited to be tested as soon as he arrived in town. In case they changed their minds, two horsemen escorted them against their will the rest of the way.

Jake was surprised at how many patrols remained active after dark, but with their levels and Soul Classes, they didn't need that much sleep. The average level of these riders was between 25 and 40, with some of them exceeding level 50.

This was more than he expected in a dump like this, as were their stats. Most were mere humans, but combined with the Aether density of this world it was enough to trounce most ordinary Second and Third Ordeal Players.

In the middle of the night, the great stone wall and majestic towers and castles of Lodunvals appeared in their field of vision and Jake and the teenager felt a welcome surge of excitement. For Trash, it was the joy of returning home alive, for Jake, the joy of getting his Soul Class and advancing his Ordeal.

The unique prospect of visiting an authentic medieval city and enjoying all it had to offer never entered his line of considerations.

"Halt! Your papers."

A vigilant guard, also in glistening heavy armor, barred their way with his long halberd as they reached the great gate. They were on the only bridge across the moat. The drawbridge was up, but another soldier on the other side of the wall was ready to lower it at the first sign of monsters or an enemy army looming.

Because Jake was traveling to Lodunvals for the first time and didn't look like one of those lousy scoundrels, he drew immediate attention. The fact that it was after midnight and they were alone on the bridge didn't help either.

Accustomed to these checks, Trash flashed his ID card in front of the guard and one of his bearded colleagues blinked several times before exclaiming with uncertainty,

"Trash? Where's Uncle Oaf and the others?"

The boy's silence and downcast expression gave him his answer.

"All dead. It was Jake who saved my life." The young mercenary played his part correctly as he gestured at him and did his best not to betray his savior's secrets.

"Phew, I see. You've got a hell of a luck kid!" The first guard expressed his compassion, while his bearded colleague darkened.

This was far from the first time they had heard this kind of news in the past few days. But, whether Jake was a savior or not, to enter Lodunvals they would have to show an ID card or get tested.

Seeing their intense, professional gaze on him, Jake knew there was no escaping it. Taking a deep breath, he blurted out,

"I don't have an ID."

It was time for Jake Wilderth to enter their registry....

Chapter 652 - Minmin

"No need to feel anxious, sir. Just a routine test and you will receive your Identity Card giving you the same rights as all other citizens of Lodunvals." The bearded guard tried to encourage him as he saw his sullen face.

Because of his appearance, they had subconsciously lumped him into the "nobility" box. Hence their politeness and friendliness.

"This will only take a few minutes." He added perfunctorily.

Jake said nothing, but his face spoke volumes. Still, he agreed to follow the procedure. Unless he was going to break the rules as soon as he arrived and alienate the whole city, he couldn't hide his abilities.

"All right. How's the test going?" Jake reluctantly agreed and tried to collect some information.

His question made the two guards frown slightly and he realized that he might have made a mistake. What he didn't understand was that being ignorant about these tests was common among peasants and ordinary citizens, but the aristocracy usually had access to these magical technologies at a young age.

Although his question was not problematic, it raised concerns about his social status. This was reflected in the guards' attitude afterwards.

Accustomed to this kind of inquiry, the guard who had stopped them with his hallerbard explained humbly, but with no honorific this time,

"Guards like us without mana are not qualified to use a Mana Tool unless there is a special authorization. And we would still need a Mage to recharge it after use."

"So?" Jake raised a puzzled eyebrow.

"It's Miss Rumplesky who will be handling your test." The guard replied coldly, already annoyed by the newcomer's slightly too laid-back attitude.

"Very well. Shall I wait here?"

"No, follow me." The second bearded guard motioned for him to follow, pointing with his thumb to a small door behind him giving access to one of the two stone towers supporting the drawbridge.

Trash didn't know if he should just walk away and grab the opportunity to go home or continue following them. The guard with the halberd, noticing his hesitation, was surprised by his behavior and asked,

"What are you waiting for? Don't tell me you want to see the results of his test."

The boy bobbed his head up and down vigorously, "I want to see."

"In that case, wait here with me." The guard agreed.

He could not allow the boy to accompany him because these tests were private. The person in charge of the test had some authority and could decide to withhold some crucial information after the result was reported to his superiors.

Leaving the teenager and the first guard behind, Jake bent his head slightly to pass through the door that stood a tad too low for him after the second guard removed the padlock blocking access.

"This door usually stays open, but with all these wars and monsters the security has been tightened." The bearded guard apologized as he saw his gaze linger for a few seconds on the large lock in his hands.

"I was rather wondering how Miss Rumplesky is supposed to get out of this tower if the lock is blocking the door from the outside." Jake admitted honestly with a shrug. His next look at the guard was far less kind. "Don't tell me you're sequestering this Miss Rumplesky inside?"

The guard immediately displayed a startled expression before exclaiming with an outraged voice,

"Of course not! Are you out of your mind? You'll understand better when you meet her in the flesh."

The guard's words tickled his curiosity, but Jake refrained from scanning the building for fear of alerting this Miss Rumplesky inside. From what the guard with the halberd had hinted, this Rumplesky was capable of using Mana, and therefore a mage.

It remained to be seen what Mana was compared to Aether, but it should be a relatively neutral and abundant energy because he hadn't felt any abrupt changes, or weakening as with the Fluid from his previous Ordeal before he understood its workings.

Jake silently followed the bearded guard down a short hallway, plus a long spiral staircase until he reached the highest floor of the tower, about 20 meters from the bridge. The guard knocked respectfully on the door, then a surprisingly thin voice stuttered,

"C-come in!"

Not really surprised that the door opened by itself, the guard invited him in and then closed the door behind Jake, leaving Miss Rumplesky alone with her guest.

Inside the luxuriously furnished room, Jake stood stupidly stiff for a few seconds, his confusion written all over his face. It wasn't because of the desk buried under multiple piles of parchments and grimoires, nor because of the exquisite decoration that clashed with the military austerity of the rest of the tower, but because there was no one in the room!

No longer having any qualms about scanning the room with his mental sense, Jake unexpectedly detected a powerful spiritual presence on the other side of the desk. If it was a human woman, even a small one, he should have been able to see the top of her hair from where he stood, but the heap of grimoire seemed to be enough to conceal her entirely.

Not in a hurry, he waited for the spiritual presence behind the desk to deign to show itself. After a moment, he heard a rustling of parchment and faint gasps of breathlessness, then the pile of grimoire at the edge of the table fell to the floor, revealing Miss Rumplesky hiding behind it.

Jake's eyes widened slightly in disbelief at her appearance, but this was not his first emotional rodeo since arriving in the Mirror Universe. After a short moment, he recomposed himself and observed the woman in front of him more attentively.

The first word that came to his mind was 'cute'. Because this young woman was not really one.

Literally as tall as a large apple, she wore a short, tight dress covered in sequins and behind her back a double pair of small fly wings flapped furiously, her face flushed with embarrassment under his intense gaze. If there was another feature, besides her small size and her wings, that attracted attention, it was the halo of electric blue light enveloping her body and giving her an unreal poise. Her long hair of the same color was tied in two long pigtails on each side of her head, giving her a rather childish appearance despite her fully mature curves.

A fairy! Jake had just met his first fairy. He had met Vampires, monsters, one of his cousins was a Werebear and another a Water Elf, but this was by far the most surprising encounter. This one sent him straight back to the fantastic folklore of his childhood reading.

"What?! Have you never seen a Minmin?" The little fairy finally took offense at his attitude, which made her feel like a rare collectible.

Jake realized that his insistent stare might seem disrespectful and he sincerely apologized. The Minmin was obviously not the type to hold a grudge, nor was she used to being treated with respect, because hearing his good faith apology she started to get fidgety again, joining the tips of her index fingers together as she lowered her head.

"It's not a big deal. It, it can happen to anyone." She babbled with difficulty before regaining her composure. "Are you here for the test?"

"I am."

" Hmm, wait for a second."

The fairy disappeared briefly, literally, into one of her desk drawers, and emerged with a strange silver shisha-like device covered in cryptic engravings.

"Am I supposed to smoke that?" Jake asked with puzzlement. This wasn't really his thing.

"Smoking? What do you mean?" The Minmin repeated without understanding.

"Forget what I said." Jake shook his head.

"Hmm. You just have to touch the Arcanitor and wait for all the runes to light up." Miss Rumplesky said as she fluttered over to him carrying the Mana Tool larger than she was. Even while flapping her wings fervently, she seemed to have difficulty supporting its weight with her small arms.

Out of reflex, Jake supported the weight of the object with his telekinesis and the fairy was deeply shocked, so much so that she almost dropped the Mana Tool in her hands.

"Telekinesis!"

Jake learned then that it was not common magic on Quanoth, even among the Mages. Delighted to meet a fellow mage, the little fairy forgot her shyness and took the initiative to answer his questions about how the Arcanitor worked.

First, she would fill the Mana Tool with Mana, then activate it after entering the password. Yeah, a password of several hundred symbols.... Good luck to whoever would try to steal this thing. Without being an expert in hacking magic items, it was just a waste of time.

A few minutes later, Miss Rumplesky, who called herself Jeanie, was sitting comfortably cross-legged in the palm of his hand, her nervousness gone, and Jake attributed the feat to his natural charm. The Arcanitor was also in the middle of his palm, ready for use.

"The test is about to begin." Jeanie warned him as she flew up temporarily so she wouldn't be tested at the same time as him.

Jake kept the same posture and one by one the runes of the Arcanitor lit up until the whole device glowed like a lantern. But the object did not stop working. Ten seconds, thirty seconds, one minute, two minutes...

After five minutes, even without the ultra-shocked reaction of the fairy whose facial expressions were like an open book, Jake knew something was wrong.

And the sad thing was, he knew exactly why.

Chapter 653 - Negotiating

'I'm fucking too strong.' Jake sighed inwardly. He could already imagine the little fairy's eyes filled with horror when she saw the test result.

And indeed, her reaction didn't disappoint.

A few moments later, the runes' glow began to dim, until it died out completely. For a few seconds, Jake thought he had narrowly escaped the danger, but the next moment, the smooth, disc-shaped top of the Arcanitor changed configuration with a clicking sound and a slot appeared in its center, which immediately spat out a metal card.

Jake didn't need to be a genius to know what it was. His ID card was ready for use, for better or for worse...

As befitting her position, Jeanie flew excitedly to the top of the Arcanitor, which to her was like a large helipad, and then began to pull the metal card furiously out of its socket. The scene could have been reminiscent of King Arthur removing Excalibur from its stone, but a lot less epic.

After a protracted struggle with the object nearly touching her chin, the little fairy eventually managed to pull out the card and laid it flat on the Arcanator to read its contents.

Snaking a peek over it from behind her, Jake was relieved to see so little written on it, but unfortunately this burst of optimism did not survive the next round.

'Silver Myrtharian? What's that?' Miss Rumplesky muttered as she loudly caught her breath after all this physical exertion.

Still, she had often come across eccentric race names that she had never heard of in the past. This was Quanoth after all. A world where Players of thousands, millions of different races were being tested all the time. The natives were not aware of it, but their species were not just random, but a deliberate choice made by Aurae after careful consideration.

Jake still thought at this point that he could get away with it, but that changed as soon as she swiped the ID card in front of another device that looked like a large prismatic brick. A large number of holographic symbols suddenly began to scroll before their eyes until they formed a huge block of incomprehensible text. Jeanie put on a tiny pair of golden-rimmed glasses and began to fly from one symbol to the other like a child reading a text by following each syllable with her finger.

Hearing her read aloud the first words and phrases, Jeanie didn't appear particularly startled, but Jake's sallow face couldn't have looked more horrified. Those first lines were identical to his own Digitized Oracle Status, but starting with ordinary details like his race, level, height or weight.

"Level 28... Is that all? I thought you were higher level... Height 4m21... You're quite the tall one, huh... Weight 3564kg, not bad, not bad, but you need to go on a... WHAT THE FUCKING HECK?!"

The full implication of those words had finally sunk in to her brain, hitting her unprepared mind hard. Such swearing in the mouth of a little fairy would have shocked anyone who knew her in Lodunvals, but Jake had mentally conditioned himself for such a vocal outburst all along.

Shifting her gaze from the holographic runes in front of her to Jake standing with his arms crossed just behind her, a state of panic soon overtook Jeanie's chilled little heart. In front of a dumbstruck Jake, she suddenly broke into tears as she tried to claw her hair out of excess anguish.

"No, no, no! I'm fucking done... You can't be 4m21! Oh my God, if Laudar or the Mage Guild finds out I broke the Arcanitor, I-I..."

For the next three minutes, forgetting about reading the holographic symbols, she shed many tears, moping about the dire fate awaiting her, namely astronomical debts and an extension of her penal servitude...

He also heard her mention regularly between two sentences "Don't want to be eaten! Who knew what she meant by that? In any case, she started to weep more and more each time after having spoken these few words.

Also reaching his breaking point, Jake, not wanting to watch the cute Minmin fall into a depressive spiral, decided to intervene. He had almost forgotten his identity card. With Jeanie's irrational distress, if he'd wanted to he could have left with it without worry.

"Take it easy." Jake placated her by gently patting her back doing his best not to crack her spine with a flick.

This method having already proven itself, he materialized another chocolate bar, but he removed the wrapper before this time prior to giving her the treat. Devoid of the slightest shred of common sense, the fairy nibbled on the chocolate without skipping a beat.

Too busy chewing, the sobbing stopped, but hiccuping noises continued to erupt from time to time. A few moments later, she was back to her old self, her belly swollen like a balloon and her face covered in chocolate. Releasing a small burp, she gushed,

"Aahh! Good stuff... You still have some?"

Picking up a greedy, insatiable glimmer in her eyes, Jake at least knew he had her full attention. Preferring to get it over with before the rest of the contents of his ID card triggered another existential crisis, he stared her straight in the eye and put his cards on the table.

"Miss Rumplesky, can I trust you?" He asked with an icy smile, as he released a sliver of his aura.

The little fairy who was still basking in ecstasy after her copious snack, suddenly got goosebumps and her body began to quiver against her will. Only then did she become aware that the man in front of her was not as harmless as his handsomeness suggested.

At this moment, a total reinterpretation of the events was replayed in her head, a completely biased and paranoid version, fed by her own phobias. In this version, Jake's kindness seemed like a sadistic intention to fatten her up to better savor her later.

"I-I don't know. Please! Don't eat Jeanie! I don't taste good!" She suddenly began to beg him, prostrating herself on the floor.

Jake felt awfully frustrated as he saw the first inklings of a second panic attack emerge. 'I've got to stop this before it hits the fan.'

"Stop it! I won't eat you!" He slapped the back of her head with minute control of his strength. "Why the fuck would I eat another human being? You think just because you're small and have wings that I'm going to become a cannibal? You overestimate yourself, little one! And if someone tries to eat you, call me for help and I'll come and teach them a lesson. Then we'll see if they still have enough teeth to eat you..."

The little fairy was deeply shocked upon hearing his answer, so much so that he thought for a brief second that she had actually suffered a brain attack. When she resumed breathing, he heaved another sigh of relief.

Since his arrival on Quanoth, he had been dealing with nothing but problems. First a stupid orphan, now a paranoid and hypersensitive fairy.

"You really don't intend to eat me?" She murmured shyly as she hid behind her desk, though it was completely unnecessary with his speed.

"Peh! I don't eat anything that even remotely resembles a human." He scoffed in disgust. "I don't even eat monkey, so definitely not a fairy."

She still seemed to have trouble believing him, but she was already pretty much convinced.

"Now read the rest of my ID and tell me whether or not I can trust you. Know that everything on it is true and that depending on your answer, even if I don't kill you, I'll be obliged to prevent you from talking. Are we clear?"

Jeanie nodded stiffly, then went back to reading the holographic symbols. Her expression changed many times, first shocked, then downright appalled. By the last few lines, she was completely livid.

Now she knew what kind of individual was standing in front of her.

"You're... a Guilty." She stated much more calmly.

"Bull's-eye!" Jake winked. "I guess you know what I want from you, then?"

Straightening up proudly, fists on hips, the Minmin called out loudly,

"You need me to forge your ID!"

At least she had a brain...

"That's right. I need you to change my information. At the very least, I want to appear as a human and if possible reduce my displayed stats to look more... average if you know what I mean."

"No problem impersonating a human." Jeanie promised readily. "But changing the level and stats displayed is impossible. This card is connected to your soul and updates in real time as long as it stays within a few feet of you. Using someone else's card won't work either. It was possible a few years ago, but not anymore with these wars. At least, I can't."

Jake became glum. He was not satisfied with this result, but he would have to make do with it. As long as he got a Soul Class, he would have a decent alibi to display. His extraordinary stats would only thicken the mystery around him and make his identity more illustrious, but he refused to believe that there was no one on Quanoth who surpassed his power.

In all of his previous Ordeals, there had always been individuals outranking him by several leagues.. No reason for that to change here, even if he was much stronger than he used to be.

Chapter 654 - New Companion

Jake let Jeanie falsify editable information like his weight, height, or species, then retrieved his brand-new ID card.

"Thanks."

The little fairy panicked again, blushing as she received his gratitude. Plainly, this didn't happen every day.

"I thought mage was an important status. Why, are you reacting like you're afraid of everyone?" Jake probed quietly.

He hadn't said anything from the beginning, but when he wanted to he could be very observant. The door at the bottom of the tower was padlocked from the outside. This detail in itself was already suspicious, but this Minmin's small size could have explained things.

The problem was that there was no window in this room either. In fact, he had not seen any form of ventilation large enough to let a tiny fairy like Jeanie through. Because of this, the tower was unnaturally damp and most of the walls and grimoires were eaten away by mold. It was not a healthy working environment.

If Jeanie didn't suffer from some form of social phobia, it could give the disturbing impression that she was trapped in this tower.

"Haha...ha..." Miss Rumplesky let out a bitter laugh upon hearing his innocuous question. "I get why you don't want to eat me. You have no idea what I'm worth. Even if it's slavery, even if I'm sequestered, I'm better off in this tower than outside. If I get out of here and walk around in plain sight, it will be wonderful if I can watch the next sunrise."

"That bad?" Jake was taken aback. "If your species, the Minmins, doesn't suffer from racism or discrimination, and the humans of Icarden aren't traditionally cannibalistic, then your body or part of it must have some exceptional value or properties."

He found it hard to imagine what that might be. The notion of material wealth, or value through scarcity didn't mean much to him, but perhaps not to other Evolvers. Still, it seemed excessive to him to persecute a sentient, almost human-looking race for its taste. It was an acceptable reason from other alien species, but not from other humans.

"No need to maintain suspense. The Minmins' treatment on Quanoth is not much of a mystery. Those still alive are hiding in the Xatathorgits' primeval lands, or have sought refuge in Ret'Asi for the ones with a human appearance like me. In either case, our status is close to slavery." Jeanie lamented without hiding her dismay.

"I was told that our sweet and fruity flesh tastes good, but indeed most humans condemn cannibalism and the Empire of Ret'Asi does not allow it either. However, Minmins do not always look human like I do and in this case they have no choice but to isolate themselves completely. No, the reason my people have been hunted to near extinction is because of the benefits you get from our consumption. Even humans are willing to perjure themselves to get a bite of a Minmin..."

"I see." Jake yawned listlessly. "If there's nothing addictive about your flesh, then eating you is probably a shortcut to more power."

This puzzle was less convoluted than he had originally feared. Jeanie was shocked by his profound indifference, but inwardly she still thought it was because he didn't yet clearly understand their value.

[Jake, keep in mind that the species created on Quanoths are based on those of the Players who participate or have participated in the past.] Xi pointed out in a low tone. [Minmins also exist in the Mirror Universe and are persecuted there as well.]

'Hmm? Let me guess. Did those memories just come back to you?' Jake teased the Oracle AI.

She had a recent knack for divulging information after he had already heard the gist of it from someone else. He suspected she was enjoying his clueless reactions every time he learned something new that she already had in her database.

[Correct.] She replied laconically. Of course, she would never admit that she loved being a know-it-all teacher, or her dignity would be gone.

[Back to the topic, Minmins are a special kind of fairy. Their nature is more like that of a Spirit and they are born from the elements, Mana, Aether and sometimes even imagination. Some folk legends ended up being verified years later in this way. As opposed to a demon, often born from the negative thoughts

of other living beings and a lot of energy, Fairies appear in sentient worlds or a place, nature, or even the Planet itself has developed a form of sentience. These Fairies are then a manifestation of its will and its generally compulsively devoted to maintaining its balance.]

[The Minmins are a manifestation of the Mirror Universe's will to resist, or the Oracle's according to some. A defensive measure that was thought to help Evolvers fighting Digestors survive better and quickly become stronger. Do you see the color of the halo enveloping Jeanie? Doesn't that remind you of something?]

Reacting to Xi's words, Jake scrutinized the little fairy in front of him more intently, who suddenly felt like a piece of meat in front of an expert butcher. Whether it was the halo or Jeanie's long electric blue hair, there was nothing special about it. When he scanned her, however, he got a very surprising result.

[Level: 21 (Digitized)]

[Species: Minmin (sub-fairies species)]

[Class: Intermediate Magic Appraiser (10% intelligence, perception and extrasensory perception per level)]

[HP: 1 (Regen: 0.033HP/d)]

[MP: 10000]

[Strength: 0.1]

[Agility: 1]

[Constitution: 0.1]

[Vitality: 1]

[Intelligence: 3100]

[Perception: 3.1]

[Extrasensory Perception: 31]

[Luck: 0]

[Water Mana Core lvl 10]

[Reference for an adult human jobless level 1: HP:10, stats: 1.]

Jeanie could use Water Magic, but had chosen Magic Appraiser as her Soul Class. That explained why she was in this tower, but that wasn't what caught his eye.

At the sight of her stats and the halo surrounding her, Jake immediately made the connection with the Cyan Intelligence Aether. It wasn't exactly the same color, but close enough to arouse his suspicions. Her Bloodline's description confirmed his assumptions.

[That's right.] Xi confirmed solemnly. [You can't see it on her digitized status, but her Intelligence Aether stat is also identical. Devouring a Minmin instantly gives you the points of its master stat in all three

Aspects, and there's no trade-off. Whatever your initial situation, devouring Jeanie will substantially improve your Aether and Body Intelligence.]

[You won't get exactly 3100 points if your stats are much higher, but consuming a Minmin will also condense the Intelligence Aether already present and purify your cells and soul, so that in the future you can easily increase your stats without having to go through high-grade Aether. So devouring Minmins is indeed a dream shortcut for anyone who wants to get strong fast regardless of the moral consequences of their actions.]

After these revelations, even Jake was tempted to have a taste of the little fairy. Of course, that was just a passing thought. At the end of the day, he still had ethics and principles preventing him from doing anything or he would have become a criminal long ago.

The truth was that most people were like Jake. Even if they knew that devouring an innocent fairy could grant them immense power, few would have the cruelty to act on it if they weren't completely desperate.

The problem was that it only took one person out of 100 or 1000 to be determined and unscrupulous enough to make the lives of Minmins a living hell. In a large, secure city like Lodunvals alone, that meant that at least a thousand people wanted to at least capture her to sell to the highest bidder, or at worst eat her themselves.

Now that Jake knew her situation, he could decide that it wasn't his business and go his own way or protect her at the risk of affecting his own Ordeal. While he felt sorry for these Minmins, he couldn't save them all without any retribution. He was neither a saint nor a philanthropist.

However, if this Jeanie was willing to keep his secrets and assist him on his journey, he could make an exception. Jake was still a gentleman at heart. He couldn't decently ignore the cries for help from a cute girl in distress.

As he headed for the door to leave the room, Jake turned his head to the little fairy flying nervously behind him and asked in succession,

"Do you know where the Celestial City is? How do you judge your understanding of Quanoth? If you know what I am, can you be of any use to me?"

With renewed hope, the fairy nodded hurriedly,

"Jeanie knows all about Quanoth! All Minmins are like encyclopedias!"

The corner of Jake's lip lifted as he heard her confident statement. He needed an excuse to ask her to come with him, and she desperately needed someone to protect her from that tower if she was going to survive this end of the world.

"In that case follow me. I'll protect you." Jake stated impassively.

No grandiosity, no heroic pride, just honesty. As long as he gave his word, he would keep his end of the bargain no matter what it took.

With this oral promise, a man who wasn't really a man, and a fairy who wasn't really a fairy, left this great tower of wet stone together to begin a great adventure.. Trash, who was waiting for them downstairs, ran after them and the forged identity card passed the guards' control without a hitch.

[Chapter 656 Soul Class Tier](#)

His first reaction after touching the stele was to shudder as he muttered to himself,

"How cold!"

The next moment, his consciousness was sucked into the stele before he even had time to process what was happening to him. If he had been in a hostile environment, this inexplicable phenomenon could have cost him his life.

Luckily for him, they were safe in Lodunvals, but with his wary nature he preferred not to dilly-dally here. The sooner he received his Soul Class, the sooner he could integrate with the natives of this world to get information.

As he tried to make sense of the strange feedback his mind was sending him, the force pulling his soul abruptly disappeared, giving his consciousness the illusion of being in an elevator that had just stopped at its destination.

He attempted to open his eyes subconsciously, but soon realized that he was unable to do so. Only his mind was inside that stele. In this world, he had no body, only his consciousness. Even his Spirit Body, which usually allowed him to perceive and affect his surroundings, seemed to be suppressed here.

Even without eyes to see though, this place seemed brighter and more wonderful than ever. His soul floated in a sort of endless sidereal void, but paradoxically he had the peculiar sensation of knowing every corner of it.

Inside, replacing the stars, there were millions, billions of luminous spots, linking to each other to form a network of shining filaments forming incomprehensible patterns and structures. Light impulses were propagating at an unimaginable speed through this network, generating an exponential tree of new signals that constantly enlarged and complexified this universe without clear boundaries.

Looking more closely at one of the patterns formed by this network, Jake recognized one of the countless "constellations" populating this mysterious universe. It, too, was connected to the entire network, its light impulses causing strange chain reactions whenever the constellation was activated or stimulated.

What troubled him deeply was that this was one of the many Soul Glyphs he had gained over the past year. Now that he recognized one of them, Jake didn't have to rack his brain to figure out where he was.

[We're inside your soul, Jake.] Xi gently confirmed his theory. [At least, this is the projection of your inner soul as the Prophetic Stele sees it. It's not perfect, but it far surpasses what a Rank 3 Aetherist like your master can do. Something this incredible, I'm afraid, is only the prerogative of Ancient Designers and top-tier Aetherists.]

Jake felt humbled as he peered into his own soul. He had felt this way before, observing the neuron activity of his own brain, but this was on a whole new level. It wasn't every day that one had the opportunity to study the workings of one's psyche on such a scale.

If someone had the nerve to tell him one day that he had a simple and predictable character, he would invite them here to compare their respective Soul World. Then they would know for sure who had the blankest mind.

Suddenly, while Jake was still amazed by the fantasy sight captured by his mental sense, a long stream of information was downloaded directly into his head. It wasn't text, let alone images, but he instantly knew all of its contents.

Soul Classes! These were all the Soul Classes available at his current level. And the first thing Jake had to admit when he read the list was that there were a lot of them. Like, a lot!

[List of available Soul Classes:]

[Tier 1: Sprinter, Swimmer, Flyer, Puncher, Kicker, Headbutter, Screamer, Grunter, Eater ...]

Trash and Jeanie had already told him about this tier of Soul Class on the way. They were the easiest to unlock from the perspective of the Prophetic Stele, but much harder to awaken naturally.

Indeed, as long as an action had been performed with enough fervor or enough times, the corresponding Soul Class had a good chance of appearing in this list. However, in order to naturally awaken a Soul Class like Sprinter, the person's mind had to be completely obsessed with the idea. Unless one was a sprinter athlete preparing for the Olympics and thinking of nothing else, this was probably impossible.

Most of these classes were generally weak and usually affected the personality of their wearer. A Headbutter, in addition to losing all versatility in combat, would often have an irrational and violent tendency to solve all these problems with a headbutt.

Nevertheless, according to Jeanie, there could be exceptions. When a Soul Class was naturally awakened, its potential for evolution was freer and the emotional investment greater, which affected its growth coefficient. In this way, a Puncher could very well outperform a Boxer, even though it was a higher Tier.

Jake didn't completely ignore the options on this list, but it was ridiculously long and the Stele had much better things to offer him anyway.

[Tier 2: Carpenter, Warden, Miner, Farmer, Hunter, Technician, Ranger, Acrobat, Barkeeper, Herbalist, Torturer, Tamer, Psychologist, Actor, Astronomist, Moneylender, Butcher, Tailor, Tanner, Brawler, Engineer ect...]

The Tier 2 choices already spoke more to him. Most of these Soul Classes were names of Glyphs he had won in the previous year, but not all. "Moneylender" and "Torturer" were obviously not jobs he had deliberately tried to pursue.

Jake winced bitterly as he saw these two professions. Moneylender? He could roughly guess where that came from. On numerous occasions, he had given Will Aether to let him manage the Myrtharian Nerds. As for Torturer? Well... Shaktilar would probably have said that this Soul Class fit him like a glove...

Again, there were some interesting choices, as some of the Soul Classes didn't seem to be the kind that would influence the character of their wearer too deeply, but for Jake it still lacked ambition. The list was also quite long, and in his heart of hearts he thought that too many options were rarely a good thing.

Xi warned him, though, that for most Civilians and weak Evolvers, acquiring a Soul Class without going through the special circumstances of an Ordeal would probably be limited to Tier 1 and 2. On top of that the cost would be exorbitant. Unless they awakened their Soul Class naturally, many were destined to remain Classless, reinforcing the social discrimination between weak and strong Evolvers.

[Tier 3: Gladiator, Blacksmith, Barbarian, Swordsman, Marksman, Assassin, Spy, Monster Hunter, Pyrotechnician, Enslaver, Artist, Soul Torturer, Fire Mage, Light Mage, Earth Mage, Spirit Mage, Slayer, Destroyer, Mentalist, Illusionist, ect...]

'Now, we're talking!' Jake smiled with delight.

To begin with, this list was much shorter than the two previous ones. He could see the end of it. But more importantly, these Soul Class names sounded much more badass!

Gladiator, Monster Hunter, Destroyer, Elemental Mage ect... It was starting to sound cool and more like him. Gladiator? He had literally lived as one of them for three months! Destroyer? In what Ordeal had he not destroyed something?

His good mood was quickly dampened, however, when his attention was drawn to the two surviving Soul Classes: Soul Torturer and Enslaver.

'Damn it! Does this Stele think I'm crazy or what?' Jake cursed loudly, but no one heard him except Xi, who started to giggle uncontrollably.

"What are you laughing at?!" He barked curtly.

[Nothing. I just think it's really funny to see you act like you're so innocent when you forced Kewanee and Svara to become your slaves during the last Ordeal without a second thought, just to be on the safe side... And as far as dear Shaktilar is concerned, there's no doubt that you're the devil himself]

Jake was stumped when he heard her reply. What could he possibly respond to that? Yeah, he was an enslaver and a soul torturer. Actually, since he despised physical torture, which left scars and blood everywhere, he much preferred psychological torture to get his way.

It was by far the most gruesome in terms of suffering inflicted, but it gave him a clear conscience in the sense that it didn't last long (for him), that he didn't have to get his hands dirty, and that there were no lasting consequences for the victim except for the exorbitant costs of a very long psychotherapy.

Refocusing on the list, he noticed that some of the Soul Classes had names that were too ordinary compared to others, such as Soul Torturer or Spirit Mage. Blacksmith seemed to belong in Tier 2, but

according to Xi that was because his talent far surpassed that of an ordinary smith. After all, he could forge Aether Artifacts.

Tier 3 was already full of good options, but the list wasn't finished yet so he continued reading.

[Tier 4: Body Enhancer, Designer, Alchemist, Berserker, Terraformer, Survivor, Geneticist, Savior, Hero, Challenger, Inventor, Master of Arms, Monster Slayer, Mage, Beast Master, Curse Breaker ect...]

Here Jake started to show surprise. These Soul Classes had more unusual names, sometimes even ordinary ones like Savior or Survivor, but their potential was even greater. The list was rather short this time and he quickly got to the end of it.

His curiosity aroused, he hurried to read the rest of the list, until he ended up transfixed by the last Tier.

[Tier 5: Spellcaster, Rune Engraver, Warmage, Elementalist, Clone Slayer, Arcanist, Ruler, Sunlord, Paragon, Chameleon, Ordeal Player, Myrtharian, Myrmidian, Kintharian, Eltarian].

[Tier 6: Harbinger of Chaos, Plot Armor Wearer, Ordeal Ace, Immortal].

As he read the last line, even Xi's consciousness began to fluctuate with shock.

[Chapter 657 Immense Frustration](#)

"Plot Armor Wearer? What the fucking heck? Does this stele think I'm the protagonist of a friggin' book or something?" Jake lampooned without realizing how damn close he was to the truth.

[Who knows?] Xi shared his puzzlement. [My memories of Soul Classes are slowly coming back, but I've never seen this Soul Class mentioned anywhere. At least the original Xi didn't know about it. But based on my experience and what we know about the Aether and the Mirror Universe, we can make several assumptions.]

"Really?" Jake made no secret of his bafflement.

What he was convinced of was that in order to naturally awaken such a Soul Class, an absolute confidence in one's destiny, a kind of fanatical conviction of being the hero of one's own story would inevitably be required for this far-fetched miracle to occur. But even if this were the case, a Soul Class like Protagonist or Main Character would have been more appropriate.

No, to awaken this particular Soul Class, one had to come close to death many times and always manage to pull through inexplicably, as if the time to die had simply not come yet. From his strictly rational point of view, this was totally absurd, but since he had learned about the Reverse Fate Bow and its posterously extravagant powers, he was much more open-minded.

[You've hit the nail on the head.] Xi agreed with his reasoning. [It is for these very reasons, however, that I advise you against choosing it. This Soul Class is undoubtedly extraordinary, but no Soul Class can make you instantly invincible. Their actual prowess, no matter what tier they are, will remain very dependent on your actual Spirit Body level. In contrast, they will affect your personality and the way you act and behave in the future in unpredictable ways.]

[Plot Armor Wearer... Just by the name alone, I'm afraid that after that the adjective foolhardiness will become a euphemism when describing you, compelling you to undertake more and more reckless and

idiotic risks. For this, outstanding luck and a natural propensity to think and act as such is ideal. This is not your case. Without the recent addition of your Beskyrian bloodline, this Soul Class would most likely never have made it onto this list.]

Jake evidently agreed with his Oracle AI. As unbelievable as this Soul Class was, if by accepting it he turned into someone he didn't recognize himself in, then it wasn't much different than brainwashing.

Harbinger of Chaos? It sounded good and Tier 6 was a testament to the immense potential of this Soul Class. Such a name was not unfamiliar to him, it was the same as one of his very first Soul Glyphs and he owed it one of his most precious Skills: Bloodline Ignition. Whatever the abilities conferred by this Soul Class, they promised to be exceptional.

Alas, such tempting perks undoubtedly had terrible drawbacks. To win this Soul Class, or rather this title, Jake had single-handedly exterminated the Chaos Zhorion Tribe. The requirements for this title spoke volumes about the changes this Soul Class would bring about in him if he were to choose it.

It should not be forgotten that the Zhorions of Chaos were a vampiric and cannibalistic species completely degenerated and thirsty for violence. They owed their appearance and abilities to their excessive consumption of Flintium, the Red Soul Stones formed from the crystallized Spirit Body of veterans who had perished in an incomparably bloody war.

Jake had something much better in his possession: Xion Zolvhur's Soul Stone. Not only did it contain a balanced Soul Energy ready to be assimilated, it also contained techniques and knowledge that he struggled to understand even to this day.

"Harbinger of Chaos? I like the potential of it, but I think it's better to keep it as a mere Soul Glyph." Jake eventually shook his head. He had no regrets. It was too dangerous.

[You're doing the right thing.] Xi approved of his decision once again. She was about to warn him about the dangers, but he hadn't let temptation blind him. Although she would never say it, she was proud of him.

"What about Ordeal Ace, then? Jake asked his Oracle AI for her opinion.

Xi was flattered by his confidence, but didn't answer immediately. After a few seconds, she hesitantly explained,

[You can choose that one, I guess, but this Soul Class isn't as harmless as you might think. Unlike the two previous Soul Classes, this is not the first time I've seen this one. To unlock it, you have to win an Ordeal. This is an extremely strict requirement and almost impossible to fulfill, but you did it in your Second Ordeal. Even in your Third Ordeal you were one of the final survivors. Nevertheless, on the scale of the vast Mirror Universe, billions of Ordeals take place every day, and that's as many winners. The stronger an Evolver becomes, the more successful a Player is at Ordeals, the greater their chance of meeting individuals with rare and exceptional Soul Classes. Ordeal Ace is one of those unique, relatively well-documented Soul Classes.]

[The attribute growth rate is one of the best, but the skills are limited to the context of Ordeals only. You can expect many privileges, like knowing in real time what Rating to expect from each action, details about your main competitors like their Oracle Rank ect... You can even choose your Ordeal destination

from a selection list. The missions you receive are broken down into many simpler sub-missions, allowing you to maximize performance without wasting time looking for your own solutions. From a combat standpoint, the Ordeal Ace also receives a boost in attributes as the Ordeal goes on, exponentially increasing his chances of victory as he gets nearer to the conclusion. Without a doubt, this is a formidable Soul Class.]

"So why talk me out of it?" Jake was confused.

[For the same reason as the previous two. It will change you. With this Soul Class, you would never have saved Trash, let alone agreed to let him go with you. You would have refused to help Jeanie, probably choosing to silence her to eliminate any risks. Instead, an Ordeal Ace would have let his Shadow Guide lead him directly to the nearest town or individual who could help him win this Ordeal. All this while flying as fast as possible and eliminating any nuisance on the way. Easy and straightforward. The missions received would also have been accomplished in a protocol and apathetic way, seeking an optimal efficiency and speed of execution and always serving directly or indirectly the ultimate goal of victory.]

Jake was beginning to see what she was getting at. Indifference. These Ordeal Aces were no different than robots while they were here. If this mindset was limited to the Ordeals, so be it, but the personality changes were much deeper. This ambition, this apathetic coldness bordering on that of a psychopath, were traits that would most certainly be prevalent in their future personalities, wherever they were and whatever they did.

[Indeed. Ordeal Aces are notorious for being a bunch of assholes. They have no friends, no lovers, never fall in love and only enter into relationships that bring them strict benefits, always in relation to their sole reason for being: To remain, to become the first. Whether the Ordeal asks them to save people or torture babies, it makes no difference to them.]

Jake was speechless when he heard this. Still, he found it hard to believe that such a noble Soul Class only created freaks.

[But it does. If you're not willing to accept the changes that come from a Soul Class, it's better to stay classless.] Xi sighed wryly. [Sadly, this Ordeal doesn't give you a choice. If you refuse to choose one, your final rating will be heavily impacted....]

Jake felt horribly helpless, but what else could he do but follow the rules? To have a choice, he had to possess a power that he could only acquire by choosing a Soul Class, which he might regret in the future.

Resigned, he reluctantly contemplated the last Tier 6 option. Immortal...

"Xi, don't tell me that if I choose this Soul Class I'll become some kind of coward unable to risk my life?" Jake tried to lighten the mood with a tasteless joke. "Unless it's the other way around, thinking I'm invincible I'll do anything without being able to stop myself?"

[Neither.] She replied cheerlessly, unmoved by his humor. [To unlock this class, all you have to do is be Immortal for real. Thanks to your Myrtharian Bloodline, you are. Kintharians, if their bloodline is pure enough and they reach a sufficient level, can regenerate from any injury, including DNA damage. Their souls can also absorb radiation, thermal and gravitational energy to sustain themselves even in a world devoid of Aether. From the perspective of the Stele, this is enough to qualify you as Immortal.]

[Note, however, that Immortal does not mean invincible or unable to die or you would have gotten a different class like Undying. Not all species with long life will awaken this Soul Class. In general, it is more characteristic of individuals who are aware of their own nature and develop an atypical personality as a result. If you choose this Soul Class, the most common personality change is a total loss of motivation and urgency. Because you know you have time, there is no rush. Compared to the three previous Soul Classes, this is a minimal backlash without much consequence in peacetime. Unfortunately, you want to get stronger as fast as possible. It's incompatible with your goals and personality.]

Xi's adamant tone sounded the death knell for his last hopes. Tier 6? Apparently it wasn't for him...

Riddled with frustration, Jake cursed Aerae, the Oracle, and all the bastards who created this sadistic evolutionary system, until he finally came to terms with his fate.

"Xi... Instead of making me pine, why don't you tell me what you have in mind instead?"

[Chapter 658 First Soul Class](#)

[Rune Engraver.] Xi spoke without hesitation.

"Rune Engraver?" Jake was slightly unsettled. It wasn't the Soul Class he would have thought of first. Sure, it was Tier 5, but engraving runes wasn't really his style either.

Of course, he could guess at the logic behind this suggestion, or at least the highlights of this Soul Class for a future Aetherist like himself.

A Tier 5 Soul Class wasn't just about carving weird inscriptions into rock. If its potential was limited to carving, engraving, and basic notions of archaeology or esotericism, this Soul Class would not have made it past Tier 2 or 3.

To reach Tier 5 and stand alongside such inspiring Soul Classes as Sunlord, Paragon, or Myrtharian, this Rune Engraver Soul Class must surely have some unique quirks.

As a disciple of a Rank 3 Aetherist, Jake knew full well that Aether Runes turned into Aether Symbols, which turned into Aether Spells. This was part of the fundamental principles of the Mirror Universe.

Casting an Aether Spell by spontaneously manipulating the ambient Aether or an Aether Core was already within his grasp, but so complex that it simply wasn't worth it in a combat situation.

Even for most Aetherists, casting an Aether Spell invented on the spot was not a viable way to fight. If an Aetherist was able to cast an Aether Spell repeatedly, he would probably turn it into an Aether Symbol, which he would then graft to his body as he did with a Bloodline.

This would then allow him to be able to cast the spell subconsciously without having to think about it, in the same way that his heart beat and his lungs pumped in and out of air without his help.

The catch was that an Aether Symbol, in order for his Aether to remain stable and not disperse, had to be etched on something. The only thing capable of manipulating the Aether was mental energy, which is why all enchanted objects and permanent spells were engraved on a piece of Spirit Body that the user then severed from his person.

The danger was that Soul and Spirit Body were one and the same, and to detach a piece of one's Spirit Body was literally to damage one's own consciousness. Novice Aetherists first had to learn to separate their Soul from their Spirit Body, learning to control their Spirit Energy without being tied to it.

Jake had already taken this step when he created his Aether Sun Core. Cekt Mogusar had upgraded his Light Aether Spell to a true sun, but Jake had still created a stable Aether Spell by his own hard work.

That was the main reason Cekt was so tolerant of him, although he was still unable to instantly cast an Aether Spell on his own.

If he became a Rune Engraver, he could expect to progress much more smoothly in that area. Simple Aether Spells that still took him long minutes, if not days for more complex Aether Symbols, would perhaps become as simple as eating or sleeping with this Soul-Class.

From this perspective, Rune Engraver only brought positives, but so did the outstanding Tier 6 Soul Classes. What really needed to be considered were the downsides to these tantalizing abilities.

[Yes, Rune Engraver.] Xi repeated slowly. [You've understood my reasoning, so there's no need to elaborate. If you weren't interested in this class, I would have suggested Geneticist or Arcanist. Geneticist is a much more limited Tier 4 Soul Class, but can greatly facilitate your path to becoming an Aetherist, and Arcanist is a very good Soul Class, but with a much wider range of interest. You wouldn't be a Jack of all trades, but the benefits you'd get from this class in a specific area would be less than lower tier but more highly specialized Soul Classes.]

"What I want to know instead, Xi, is what do I risk?" Jake cut her off impatiently. "Ordeal Ace would have made me a selfish psychopath, Plot Armor Wearer would have made me mindlessly reckless and arrogant, while Harbinger of Chaos would have turned me into the devil himself. Rune Engraver... What's the big deal?"

Xi was silent for a short while, then answered apologetically,

[The catch is that you'll become slightly passionate about rune engraving and anything else that's remotely related to it.]

"Passionate?" Jake perked up warily.

Xi cleared her throat uneasily.

[Ahem, more like obsessed, like a real manic disorder.]

"Oh... That's it?" Jake replied with admirable composure, but having their souls linked Xi could sense that a dangerous volcano was about to erupt. Unsurprisingly, Jake snapped right after.

"Just obsessive-compulsive disorder, huh... SERIOUSLY! Damn it, Xi! Don't you have a better crappy idea up your ass to come up with?!"

It took the poor Oracle AI many minutes to convince Jake that this was the best solution. Whatever his choice of Soul Class was, it would result in major behavioral changes.

Myrtharian? He already had a Myrtharian Soul. In some ways he already had a Soul Class since he got his Bloodline. This explained most of his personality changes like his propensity to challenge himself and seek victory.

With the addition of the Silver Alloy he had absorbed, he had achieved a remarkable balance between his different personality traits and was pretty much in control. According to Xi, if he chose Myrtharian as his Soul Class, all of his Bloodline personality traits would be drastically enhanced. It was not worth the risk, and she felt that his mental strength and True Will were not nearly strong enough to withstand such changes. Before he could even think about remaining himself, he would slowly become a true Myrtharian.

The other Soul Classes were no different. Paragon sounded good, but it implied the notion of being and wanting to be a role model for all. Like Ordeal Ace, it impelled one to be the best at everything in an inherently wicked way.

Sunlord was the only Soul Class that Xi didn't have much of an opinion on. The term was vague enough that no one had a clear idea of what it entailed. Control the sun? Become the sun? Literally? Figuratively? Either way, she believed wholeheartedly that a Soul Class with such an iconic and catchy name would have heavy consequences for its wearer.

So, after a long conversation where Xi did her best to reassure him, Jake selected Rune Engraver as his first Soul Class. In making his choice, he was as nervous as declaring love to his first crush. The result was a disgraceful rejection, but that wasn't the point...

[Selection of Rune Engraver as your Soul Class confirmed]

[Soul Class: Beginner Rune Engraver: 25% Intelligence, Perception, Extrasensory Perception, 15% Vitality and Constitution per Spirit Body level]

[Related Soul Class Skills:]

[Rune Engraving: Easier understanding of any Rune. Any Rune that is drawn, engraved once correctly, can be instinctively reproduced the subsequent times.]

[Deciphering/Coding: Rune Engravers are experts at deciphering languages using unknown alphabets or symbols and excel at creating any form of coherent code based on clear principles...]

[Word of Power Magic: By infusing enough willpower and Soul Energy into the written words and runes, these can come to fruition.]

BOOM!

As soon as Jake received the notification, it was as if an atomic bomb had just exploded in his head, sweeping away his old soul and rebuilding it in a different way, with a stronger foundation.

Even before he received his Soul Class, his Spirit Body was already level 28. His Intelligence, Perception and Extrasensory Perception had just been instantly multiplied by 7. It was the biggest instant intelligence power-up he had ever received in his life and the feeling he got was unimaginable.

An unparalleled mental clarity as if he was opening his eyes for the first time, an unreal feeling of being able to predict and calculate everything, and simply the ecstasy of going from dullard to prodigy in the blink of an eye. The feeling of confidence and control it gave him was simply intoxicating.

Then, all that he had lived and experienced in his life came back to him, in a completely different light. His disgusting handwriting in high school? If Jake wasn't in spirit form, he'd already be tearing his hair out in shame and frustration. His native language, French? A language with unnecessarily complicated grammar and spelling. English, a language too simple but with too many words with redundant meaning!

From this point on, Jake started to lose himself in sharp criticisms against his friends' writing, to rant inwardly against the spelling mistakes in the subtitles of his favorite movies and series, the inappropriate choice of certain words, the questionable aesthetics of this or that slogan, etc. It was an endless and uncontrollable spiral of criticism.

When he thought about the vain pride he had felt when he finished his first Aether Rune, he was so angry that he could have killed himself because he was so ashamed of his past performance.

'What the fuck is this ugly Rune?!'

It was only after many hours in the Prophetic Stele that he finally managed to calm down. It wasn't on purpose, it was just that after spitting out all his venom, he had finally grown tired. Rather than dwell on the past, he simply swore that he would never again be such a despicable and mediocre human.

All the while, Xi stood back silently, trying hard not to burst out laughing.

[Chapter 659 Full-Scale Brawl](#)

"Is that good? Did you have a good time?" Jake cringed as he rubbed his temples over his horrible headache.

His Soul had finally returned to its fleshy shell. The return to reality was brutal and he reflexively closed his eyes to avoid losing his temper as he read the crooked letters of a wooden sign indicating the name of the temple square and the adjacent streets. Even the amateurishly carved inscriptions on the Prophetic Stele made him feel itchy.

"It's going to be hard..." Jake muttered, biting his tongue to quell his frustration.

"What's going to be hard?" The little Minmin's squeaky voice asked innocently from inside his mantle.

Too lazy to answer, Jake asked another question,

"How long did it take me to get my Soul Class?"

Trash counted with his fingers before realizing he couldn't count. Even if he could, he didn't have a watch or any way of knowing the time. Jake facepalmed, suddenly feeling drained, but fortunately the fairy was able to answer him.

Pulling a tiny silver pocket watch from her pocket, she proudly declared,

"Seven to eight seconds at the most."

Jake rolled his eyes at Jeanie's laughable attempt to garner his admiration, or at least his gratitude. If she hadn't looked at the time before, how could looking at the time afterwards possibly help her know how much time had passed?

This question, from the beginning, Jake had never expected an accurate answer.

'Seven to eight seconds? That means that time is practically frozen inside the Prophetic Stele.' He stroked his chin thoughtfully as usual, his eyes still closed to escape the torture imposed by his immediate surroundings. 'If my soul wasn't completely cut off from the outside world, including my Oracle Device, this could have been the perfect cheat to train my mind, gather knowledge and perfect my techniques. Either way, it proves that Time Magic exists in the Mirror Universe. At least this Aerae isn't an Ancient Designer for nothing...'

[Of course.] Xi snorted scornfully. [To create such a complete Soul Class system, he can only be an ultimate Aether expert. There are very few Aetherists who can match him. Without him, a tiny minority of Evolvers would be able to awaken a Soul Class. They would have no name, no precise classification, and it would have taken a tremendous amount of soul force and a long process of accumulated experience to achieve this transcendence of the soul.]

'Yeah, yeah, I got it. Such a great guy.' Jake retorted sardonically. That didn't keep this Soul Class system from being completely messed up.

Gurgle, gurgle!

Jake's ears twitched. The gurgles came from both a pocket in his coat and the teenager to his right.

"All right. Let's get that breakfast." Jake smiled, as he recalled that Trash had indeed not enjoyed a real meal in several days.

Jake wasn't familiar with the city's establishments, but a scan of his wristband allowed him to locate most of the inns and other restaurants. He didn't care if he was spotted by other Players or local bigwigs. In fact, he wanted nothing more than that!

The scan report told him that there were a bunch of strikingly powerful individuals scattered throughout Lodunvals, though most were located near the palace. The other places to be careful were the main guilds of the city, especially that of the Adventurers and Mages.

In the end, Jake didn't have to pick one, as Trash insisted on dragging them to his old gang's favorite inn, the facility almost being their second home. Jake and Jeanie were looking forward to a tasty and filling meal, but they were soon disappointed when they saw the condition of the place.

Describing the inn as a dumping ground may have been an exaggeration from the outside, but the filthy alleyway in front of it could definitely be called a cut-throat. The crooked and almost illegible writing on the rotten wooden sign dangling above the door especially... Jake's face almost started to convulse as it broke his heart.

Seeing Jake's distraught and pained expression, Trash immediately broke into a cold sweat and quickly justified himself,

"I-I swear the food is great. It's one of the most famous inns in town! Uncle Oaf always said that the reputation of the Holy Dung Quagmire Inn extends to the farthest reaches of the Icarden province!"

Jake's face was ugly now. Just the name of this inn portended the worst.

"Tell me... Trash? You and your mercenary gang... How rich were you?" He couldn't help but check.

"Super rich!" The teen proudly raised his fist. "Uncle Oaf always said that truly rich people are flat broke and swimming in a sea of debt. Because you have to be rich to keep living like that. A poor person would have killed himself."

'Oh my god...!' Jake was this close to slapping him.

"I retract everything I didn't say, but thought with all my heart." Jake stated stoically.

"What?"

"Uncle Oaf was a brilliant man. I thought he picked your name when he was drunk, but he apparently knew pretty well what he was doing." Jake praised as he ripped the sign off the wall with his hand.

Trash wasn't offended, but he still had enough brain cells to tell that it wasn't a backhanded compliment. Still, before he could give it much thought, his curiosity overcame his doubts as he watched Jake erase the engravings on the wooden sign.

Using his telekinesis, Jake cut a thin layer of wood from the sign's surface and smashed it with his foot, then with his fingertip he rewrote the initial message, this time with gorgeous calligraphy that he wouldn't have felt capable of even the day before. At last, he put the updated sign back in its place and entered the inn.

After they entered the inn, the word "Holy" that he had rewritten began to glow with a mystical energy that was pure and sacred. The tramps and other misfits and laborers hanging around the front of the inn immediately felt the difference, one of them even began to sob inexplicably. It was as if he had just been forgiven for his misdeeds.

They all began to search for the root cause of the phenomenon, but came up empty-handed. Eventually, they remembered the handsome man who had just entered and their inquisitive eyes focused on the rotten wooden sign.

One of them promptly tried to grab it, but was met with a frontal kick to the face by one of the delinquents present. A few seconds later, a full-scale brawl broke out in front of the inn. The trophy of this glorious battle: A rotten wooden sign.

Meanwhile inside, Jake, Trash and Jeanie had already found a table to sit at and had already placed their orders. The interior of the inn was just as Jake had imagined, dingy, damp and full of shady, hooded guys. However, the atmosphere was welcoming and there were also many ordinary adventurers happily celebrating their homecoming.

Alcohol was flowing, drunken warriors were dancing on the tables to the beat of the applause along with several damsels just as drunk as they were, while boisterous laughter broke out over and over

again as a result of dirty jokes. In a corner, a ringed bard was playing his lute while yawning, very much at the end of his rope.

Such a scene would not have been unusual in the evening, or even at the end of the night. The thing was, the sun had just risen. It was an hour when the late sleepers were supposed to be sleeping, while the early risers were getting ready for work. In any case, it was not a time to binge drink.

A few minutes later, a pretty but exhausted waitress slalomed over to them with the food they had ordered, avoiding the wandering hands of perverts trying to touch her butt. To please the two gluttons, he had ordered a little bit of everything and she had to go back and forth several times to bring everything.

As Trash gracelessly pounced on a huge prime rib, Jeanie's skittish but clearly envious head popped out of his pocket, the fairy not hesitating to fling her abandoned puppy look at Jake.

"Can I come out?" She whispered bleakly.

Jake swept his gaze over the room and seeing that no one was paying attention to them, nor did they have exceptional mental strength, he spread his Spirit Body until it encompassed the entire inn and all its customers. Unaware of it, they all became victims of a group hypnosis, which made them completely forget the presence of the trio.

"You can go out, but don't go too far from the table."

"Hooray!"

Overjoyed at the chance to stretch her wings, the Minmin swirled above the table, flapping frantically, but none of the other guests noticed the droning. It was as if their brains had filtered out the noise.

The fairy may have been tiny, but her small size was misleading. Minmins were semi-spiritual creatures and should not be regarded as normal beings. In the end, she had almost as much appetite as the teenager.

Jake definitely had the biggest appetite of the three, but after swallowing dozens of pounds of food out of gluttony he stopped and produced a tiny pebble which he swallowed in an instant.

Trash and Jeanie were stunned as they witnessed the scene, their mouths agape as they forgot to chew. Jake could have explained, but he remained silent.

The explanation was simple. The attributes derived from his Aether Stats didn't require more energy, since their effect was applied to matter and energy like an amplifying coefficient.

This was not the case with his Body Stats, which were fundamentally anchored to the material world. With few exceptions, more strength required more muscle and therefore more energy to mobilize. This was reflected in his mass and ordinary food had long since become inadequate to his needs.

[Chapter 660 A Long Journey](#)

Although his stomach was more efficient than an incinerator and could squeeze out all the energy from ordinary nutrients, the Myrtharians' energy of choice was still minerals, a few metals, along with heat

and radiation. It had taken Jake quite a while to come up with a suitable replacement power source, but he had finally succeeded.

That little gravel that looked vaguely like a brownish pellet was military-grade plutonium-239, an artificial radioactive atom derived from uranium-238 in nuclear power plants. At his request, Will had gone to great lengths to get his hands on this prized commodity.

Back then, when Earth still existed, getting your hands on plutonium would have been impossible without special authorization. On B842 it was different. There were more valuable sources of energy than radioactivity and any material, as long as it was ordinary, could be easily obtained through the Oracle Store.

On this occasion, Will didn't even have to resort to such an extreme, although their finances did allow it. With the good relationships he had built with New Earth and a few other important Earth factions, he had managed to buy a few pounds or so fairly legally.

One would assume that the Earth Union would refuse to sell such a critical resource, but this was the Mirror Universe. An endless world where there were aliens and monsters capable of destroying entire galaxies with a sneeze.

The Evolver that could be crushed the day before could surpass the military might of an entire nation a few weeks later if the odds were in his favor. Was it really worth it in this case to refuse selling a scrap of plutonium to another promising Earthling in need?

Beyond that, Earth Union had other, less overt motives, but as long as Jake got his morning plutonium, he couldn't care less. Once in his stomach, the radioactive ore had a half-life of about three days, providing him with a steady stream of energy. He could choose to digest the pellet instantly, but it would take some effort. Since he couldn't spend his life in lava, it was a good compromise.

While Jeanie and Trash competed to see who could eat the most, Jake opened his Oracle Device interface and consulted his faction's communication chat.

[Will: Where are you guys? I'm in Kanui at the inn ****]

[Lucia: I appeared in Gondenete Castle with a Knight Captain status, but it is currently overrun by a horde of Dragonids...]

[Hephaist: ...I am a retired assassin forced to help my city one last time.]

[Peter Brady: You absolutely must try this magic weed I found at *****]

[Gerulf: ... It's cold.]

[Rogen: ... It's hot.]

[Enya: I am lost.... I appeared on an island and have been flying over the ocean ever since.]

[Elya: Sis! Tell me where you are and I'll come find you!]

[Tim: I'm in front of the Divine Academy!]

[Ulfar: I am in the Divine Academy.]

[...]

[Everyone: ... Fuck you, Ulfar!]

Jake was speechless. As he read the beginning, the discussion was still cordial, but the more it went on, the more he realized that he was not the most to be pitied for this Ordeal. As for Ulfar... Well, with this sickening luck it was to be expected.

Not everyone had responded yet, but that didn't mean they were in danger. Jake himself simply stopped by to say hello, to reassure the others and let them know what he knew about his location.

Thanks to Will, who was apparently in the Ret'Asi Empire's capital, they learned that they were, with a few exceptions, all scattered over the same territory, but because of their identities and side missions, very few could leave their area to join the others.

This might sound like good news, but the Celestial City was tens of thousands of kilometers north of the Ret'Asi Empire. Tim had confirmed that he was in the Shatug Empire, a non-human empire ruled by the Drurs, and that was where they had to go.

Tim had not revealed much about these Drurs, but from his concern he was not exactly in his element.

The discussion then shifted to the topic of Soul Classes, but disappointingly not many of them had chosen theirs. There were even some who still didn't know about the Prophetic Steles and the Auras prophecy.

Interestingly, Will had opted for the Tier 4 Soul Class of Beast Tamer rather than a profession based on his trading skills. He had hesitated with Dragon Rider, but his Oracle AI had finally discouraged him.

Hephais had unsurprisingly chosen the Shadow Assassin Class and insisted on not being bothered unless they wanted to order someone's death. Jake was also struggling with the side effects of his own Soul Class, so he also warned the others heavily of the risks involved. It was an important decision that they definitely couldn't make lightly.

A few moments later, Jake closed the chat and that coincided with the end of their breakfast. Being a gentleman, he paid the bill to Trash's delight, but he took no pride in it. The gold coins in his possession he had looted from Uncle Oaf's corpse. May his soul rest in peace...

"Jeanie, where would you go in this city if you wanted to look for information? Especially to get to the Shatug Empire." He asked out of the blue.

The little fairy was sprawled in a X shape over the table, her belly round as a balloon, but she somehow managed to raise her head to stammer nervously,

"Wh-why do you want to go to the Shatug Empire? It's-it's too dangerous!"

Jake frowned.

"I thought you knew where the Celestial City was..."

"AH! Ah... Of course I know, hehe..." Jeanie seemed to realize her blunder and was able to put herself together.

In front of Jake's piercing stare, the Minmin chickened out and shyly mumbled an apology,

"I don't know, okay! I just heard it was north of the empire. I was just hoping it was in the northeast or northwest and not directly north."

"And why that?" Trash asked with his mouth full. He hadn't been hungry for a long time, but after a lifetime of deprivation he couldn't bring himself to waste food.

"Because I'm a Minmin!" She yelled before shaking her head helplessly. "It may sound selfish, but humans aren't safe in Mirik and Shatug either. Between Ret'Asi and the Empire of Shatug, there is the Maze of Mirik directly to the north. This is a very large nation under the control of an extremely advanced type of bug with a high reproductive capacity that we refer to as the Shrons. The labyrinth was dug by their workers and is virtually unpassable. They are currently the main threat to Ret'Asi and the only reason the human races remain pretty much united despite their differences."

"And by flying?" Jake interjected, "Is it crossable?"

"I-I don't know." Jeanie hesitated. "At least if it is, no one has come back to brag about it. Anyway, the real problem is the Shatug Empire. The Drurs are humanoid giants adept at both magic and science. Their technology combines both and is considered the most advanced in Quanoth. In theory, without their consent it is practically impossible to cross their borders. They are a proud and individualistic race, and the other life forms of Quanoth are only consumables in their eyes. For a non-Drur to survive there with the status of a slave or pet is considered a fine achievement worthy of respect."

Gulp!

Trash was horrified. So livid that he had completely lost his appetite. He wasn't so sure anymore about traveling to the Celestial City. If he was going to die, he'd rather die in a city he knew than end up sliced up in a butcher shop in Shatug. As for surviving to the end by fighting his way to the Celestial City? That was a far-off dream for him.

Jake didn't care about their moods and he repeated his previous question, still looking for information. The fairy was still adamant about following him, so she composed herself and emphatically recommended the Library of Lodunvals. An obvious choice, but not without its complications.

This was not Earth, sadly, and knowledge was not free, let alone self-service. The library belonged to the Count of Lodunvals and he was an arrogant pro-aristocratic prick. Without noble status or special permission, the library was not open to the public.

This was fortunate, because these special permits were by no means difficult to obtain, much to the disappointment of the local lords. All one had to do was enter one of the Major Guilds. Like the places of worship consecrated to Auraa, their establishments were set up everywhere on Quanoth and even in hostile countries, their professionalism always being the same.

All forms of violence inside these buildings were forbidden and anyone who dared to murder their staff would be sentenced to death immediately. The bounties were so high that it was akin to making the whole of Quanoth its enemy.

There were several reputable Major Guilds such as that of the Warriors, the Mages, the Assassins, but the best known and most open was by far the Guild of Adventurers. Jake had already planned to visit it, and this only sped up his plans.

Sated, the fairy curled up in a ball inside his overcoat pocket, then fell asleep. The trio then left the inn, too relaxed to pay attention to the mess caused by the recent brawl in front of the building.

Several tramps were lying unconscious on the floor, but Jake just assumed they were drunk. If he had just looked overhead, however, he would have seen that the wooden sign for the inn was gone. Even if he had realized it, it probably wouldn't have changed his plans.