

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 147 - Rewards (part 1)

After a time that was difficult to determine, Jake gradually regained consciousness. He was unable to tell how long he had been unconscious and the pitch blackness around him was not helping. He couldn't feel his body and couldn't breathe. Being deprived of all his senses made him doubt his own existence and it was an extremely disturbing feeling.

After a while his last memories came back to him and he couldn't help but whisper with a real surprise:

‘Did I survive? Or did I die during the Ordeal?’

Of course, only silence answered him. There was no air where he was. Without air to vibrate, there could be no sound. He was reassured, however, when he heard Xi's mental voice.

[You were repatriated at the last minute. It was a close call, but you survived.] The soft female voice told him what had happened.

‘That means...’

[Congratulations. You've indeed passed your first Ordeal.] Xi confirmed with a tone that seemed... relieved? Excited? Or perhaps a combination of both.

‘Where are my rewards then?’ Jake asked with some impatience. He couldn't wait to see what he'd been working so hard for those two months.

As he recalled his efforts over the past few months, the faces of everyone he had met during this Ordeal came to his mind. The austere face of Priscus. The nonchalance of Khazus or the simplicity of Gerulf. He remembered Lucia, whom he had only known for a few days, but had changed greatly under his tutelage.

He sighed.

‘I hope they made it out...‘

[...]

‘Xi, you told me that no one really knew if these Ordeals were real worlds or virtual realities. ‘ Jake suddenly remembered. ‘ The Digestor’s presence gave us the answer, didn’t it? ‘

[...], I epull.]

‘Isn’t it strange that no one noticed earlier? Unless your memories have been tampered with once again...‘

[It’s possible...] Xi recognized, plagued by doubt. [But I’m certain there were never Digestors in previous Ordeals. Not even to train the new Players. The Digestors are an invisible variable to the Oracle System that distorts every prediction.]

[The Oracle would never intentionally allow these creatures to proliferate in any of its Seed Worlds. When you discovered these Digestors, the Oracle System immediately reacted as expected by activating the àssimilation of this world into the Mirror Universe.]

‘ Is this how it went for Earth? ‘ Jake wondered as he heard the AI’s explanation.

[More or less, but there were few Digestors on Earth. I think that other exoplanets in your Universe took the brunt of the Digestors invasion. Earth comparatively was barely affected.]

Very little affected? Virtually every major city was wiped out! Many nukes had been fired and these areas had become uninhabitable and quarantined. At least that was the official version, but it didn't take a genius to understand that this had been a disaster for their planet.

As Jake wondered how much longer he would have to wait for his results, a notification from the Oracle System woke him up from his torpor.

[Participant: Jake Wilderth, Earthling.]

[First Ordeal concluded]

[Twnu: Halomzahfi: Punipq/ Ffrofloah]

[Aether density: 0.8 or 8 pts]

[Number of participants: 8,658,435]

[Main Mission: Survive two months.]

[Penalty for failure: None.]

[Evaluating the Ordeal in Progress...]

[...]

[Evaluation complete. The result is as follows:]

[-Main Mission; Rating: Perfect= +100]

[-Side Mission 1: Show your value; Rating: Excellent +5]

[-Side Mission 2: Follow the Ludus' Training (60/60); Rating: Perfect: +20]

[-Side Mission 3: Save and Protect (Lucia, Gerulf, Priscus and Khazus survived, Lucia saved directly); rating: Excellent= +20]

[Side Mission 4: Raise Princess Lucia into a true warrior; rating: Excellent= +20]

[Exploration; Rating: Low]

[Proactivity; Rating: Average= +5]

[Fighting; rating: Active= +10]

[Other exploits:]

[Exploit n°1: One of the two survivors of the Coliseum; rating: +10]

[Exploit n°2: Defeating the General in the Arena; Rating: +15]

[Special Exploit n°3: Discovering the Digestors and a Deserter; Rating: +100]

[Tmofi zfoare: +305]

[This score is among the top 0.01% of this Ordeal.]

[Distribution of rewards in consequence:]

[Reward n°1: Oracle Rank +3= Private | Private 1st class| Corporal| Sergeant.]

‘Wow, skipping three ranks at once?!‘ Jake exclaimed with surprise.

If he had really been promoted one rank for every 100 points he had scored, he understood better why the Ordeals were so important. When he looked at the experience needed to move up to Rank 6, a deep sense of despair descended upon him.

[Oracle Rank 5, Sergeant= 0/ 100,000,000]

The experience required to be promoted to Rank 6 was simply colossal. Only the Oracle knew how many Digestors he would have to kill on B842 to accumulate enough experience points to be promoted again. On that level, it was better to play Ordeals.

After a short interruption, a new notification appeared.

[Reward n°2: Pure Myrmidian Blood, for getting Lucia's favor with a rating above 200.]

[Reward n°3: Pure Kinthar Blood, for getting Gerulf's favor with a rating above 200.]

Jake was thrilled to receive these two rewards, but he couldn't understand how the Oracle had obtained the blood of these two people. On the other hand, he couldn't feel his body and had obviously brought nothing with him from this world.

[The Oracle's Genetic and Aetheric Database is immeasurable.] Xi explained. [The Oracle System is supposed to work in these Ordeals, which means that these worlds have been scanned and are part of the System. So the Oracle knows all about the genetics and Aether of its inhabitants.]

' Oh... Makes sense. ' Jake said with a deep sense of insignificance.

At that moment, an interface similar to an online store appeared in his mind with all kinds of Rewards. These were classified into different categories with a price displayed next to them that seemed to match his Rating.

Reward n°4: Ordeal Store, 305 credits to spend. If they are not used, they will be saved for the next Ordeal. Sergeant Rewards and below available for purchase.]

'Nice!'

Now, that was a reward system that he liked. He wasn't the compulsive online shopper type, but it made him feel like he had some kind of control over his destiny.

[Categories:]

[Aether/Genetic Code Enhancements]

[Krmjiuteu frt lcaii]

[Aether Skills]

[Oracle Device Skills/Upgrades]

[Objects/ Machinery/Vehicles]

[Organic/inorganic materials]

While surfing the interface, Jake discovered all sorts of rewards, each one more tempting than the last. Especially the Aethers Skills section was super exciting. Some of them could immediately change his life like this one for example:

Telekinesis lvl 1: The ability to control objects at a distance by thinking within the range of your Extrasensory Perception. Price: 500 credits.]

‘Ugh...’ He felt depressed right away.

Even after an entire Ordeal he didn't have enough to buy these kinds of skills. There were other, more affordable skills like Lamine's Perfect Sight or Amy's Frenzy, but from his point of view it wouldn't do him much good with his current stats.

Lamine's Perfect Sight was incredible, but this skill only really shone in the hands of an experienced sniper like him. At close range, Jake never missed his target either, thanks to his Agility and high

Perception. Besides, there were several types of Perfect Sight and only the most basic Perfect Sight was affordable.

As for Frenzy, there were several versions with the price increasing exponentially each time. Amy's version that temporarily doubled the Strength and Perception was lvl 1 and costed 200 points.

Jake then lost interest in those Aether Skills, that were far too expensive for him, to focus on the second category 'Knowledge and Skills'.

This one was completely different from the first category. All kinds of skills were listed from Cooking to Swordplay. A number of points were associated for each of these skills corresponding to the level of proficiency, sometimes with an associated grade like Novice or Beginner.

The Oracle could directly transfer the knowledge of a particular skill or knowledge to the brain, but the prices were very high. For about 100 credits, he could get the experience of a freshly graduated professional in the field or skill of his choice, which corresponded to a skill proficiency of 50 pts, or Beginner, the level just after Novice.

The problem was that there were also skills where getting just a few mastery points required more than 500 credits.

There again, his 305 credits would have quickly been wasted. He then scrolled through the catalogue of the other categories, but each time the appallingly high prices would remind him of how poor he was.

Eventually, he turned his attention back to the second category again and an idea came to him.