

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 192 - Ordeal Rewards

Jake interrupted his experiment and looked up at the pink-haired noblewomen with a puzzled expression.

‘If your Extrasensory Perception and Intelligence are high enough, it comes by itself. AS natural as breathing.’ Jake explained in a calm tone, without showing any sign of contempt or judgment.

It turned out that this information was new, not only to the two sisters, but to Sarah as well. Kyle knew about the Seventh Stat because he was with Jake when Lu Yan first told them about it.

In an early Ordeal oriented towards physical training and hand-to-hand combat, if a Player wasn't actively trying to increase his Intelligence or harvest Aether it wasn't so easy to improve those stats.

Despite Will's physical weakness, Jake suspected him of having a much higher Aether Intelligence Stat than he let believe. After all, he was the only one whose Ordeal wasn't fully focused on fighting.

Sarah had just awakened her Seventh Stat during last night's battle against the Digestors, while the two sisters had just enough to maximize their Vitality and pay their rent for the coming week. Although they had a few hundred points left, they were in no hurry to spend them.

Seeing that none of the three women were familiar with the term, Jake told them what he knew, not to mention the circumstances in

which he had awakened his own. Hearing Jake's simple but clear explanations, the three women sighed, but for different reasons.

Sarah regretted that she had been too dumb and that she had not used the Myrmidian blood effect to exercise her intellect through learning, self-control, or meditation. She wanted so much to become a strong woman capable of surviving on her own that she had completely abandoned herself in training during this Ordeal. If she had been able to think calmly for even a moment, she could easily have realized her mistake.

'If I had known...' Sarah couldn't help but mumble with regret on her face.

'It's not entirely your fault. Jake comforted her in earnest. 'Don't forget we had the Throsgenian body and the Blessing that went with it. Our cognitive faculties were reduced and our aggression and impulsiveness increased. This Ordeal was not meant to make us smarter, but to increase our chances of survival in the Mirror Universe. '

'But that didn't stop you from doing the right thing...' Sarah snorted.

'Just luck.' Jake replied with a smile of false modesty.

Both sisters lamented learning this so late for a completely different reason. Their Ordeal had a similar purpose, which seemed to be a common feature of the first Ordeals, even though the sandbox character of the Ordeal Worlds offered all kinds of opportunities to those willing to seize them. It was clear, however, that they hadn't seized any of them.

What they regretted was that it was clear that their chance to regain their magic lay in the improvement of these two Aether stats. If they had made the right choices, they might have awakened their Seventh

stat much sooner. Then their Fireball skill might not have been so useless.

Having finished with his tests, it was time to move on to the critical step: Breaking his knee again. Alas, Jake may have been brave and hardened, but it was different when he had to break his own leg. Just thinking about it made him shiver.

His old habit of procrastinating came back at full gallop at that very moment, and in a split second he found something else to talk about to postpone the inevitable.

‘What did you choose as a reward at the end of the Ordeal?’ Jake inquired with heartfelt curiosity. ‘Sarah, I know about your gladius, but that shouldn’t be your only reward, should it?’

Tfcur fgfhc gw ovu aqnmqnop ypuloamr, Szfzv zuqfarut laiuro dmz f jvaiu, vuz nphcuzut ianl frt dpzzmjut gimrt uwugzmjl lvmjare ovfo lvu jfl aqquzlut ar arourlu zudiuhoamr. lr ovu urt, lvu nzduzzut om lnufe dzfrciw.

‘The gladius was indeed my special reward, but I got another one that I haven’t used yet. I left it in my cabin, though.’

‘What’s that, blood?’ Jake thought it was most likely.

‘Yes... Myrmidian blood, but not pure. So I wasn’t really interested. And the negative effects of this bloodline in the event of defeat are too risky.’ Sarah justified her choice as best she could.

‘So you must have some credits left?’ Jake asked again to confirm his deduction.

‘A few yes...’

Sarah clearly didn't want to answer that last question and Jake didn't insist. It was possible that some of her credits had been spent on improving her gladius or improving the purity of the Myrmidian blood. There were plenty of other possibilities, but these were limited to rewards worth less than 200 credits.

'What about you?' Jake turned to the two sisters who had remained quiet during their exchange.

The two princesses exchanged glances and then came to the realization that they were still alive only because of him. Keeping a secret about an Aether skill they had used constantly during last night's battle was ridiculous. It was Enya who answered.

'For the same reason we stupidly rented a furnished cabin with a bed and a bathroom, our Ordeal rating was pretty poor. We merely finished the Ordeal by doing the minimum required, despite our belief that we had gone through a real hell. We only had 100 credits, so we bought the only Aether skill within our reach that could suit us.'

A tuqmrlozfoamr guare jnzov qmzu ovfr f imre ukniffoamr, ovu wmpre jmqfr zfalut vuz vfrt ar dzmro md ovuq, nfiq omjztl ovu huaiare, ovur f dazugfii jfl limjiw euruzfout ar ovu qattiu md vuz vfrt proai ao jfl ovu laxu md f ourral gfii. Tvu nzmhull vft ofcur qmzu ovfr our luhmrtl.

Although the magic trick was impressive, that was all it was, a magic trick. You couldn't hope to kill a Digestor with it. Apart from warming their backs, the effect of such a spell was extremely limited.

Nevertheless, Jake, whose stats were higher, perceived more. Although it was clear that Enya hadn't yet awakened her Seventh

Stat, the surrounding Aether was slowly converging towards her hand as if it was under her control.

Jake could certainly do the same with the Aether within ten meters of his person, but he couldn't possibly reproduce the last stage in his normal state. That is, the step that transmuted a simple mass of Aether into flame, then controlled those flames to make them take on a spherical shape and finally cast the spell on the enemy.

Right now, however, things were different. The Kintharian blood was still active and that gave him instinctive control over the earth, but it also gave him an acute sensitivity to anything that gave off heat. Yet this did not mean that he could replicate this spell.

Flames were the result of an exothermic chemical reaction called combustion and it was clear that he could not exercise such fine control over matter. All he could do was thermally agitate the matter, hoping that the increase in heat would produce the desired effect.

He was only an amateur and the little magic he had he owed it to the blood's properties. Once the effect faded, he would once again become unable to perceive or control these elements.

There was, nevertheless, one thing he could do in his normal state, and that was enough to make this lvl 0 Fireball skill viable.

'The shape is set? Can you affect the formation of the spell?' Jake asked a series of questions to satisfy his need for understanding.

Enya didn't think he'd be as interested in their Aether spell, but she tried to answer as best she could.

'We have no control. The fireball is always the same size, always forms at the same speed and is thrown at a fixed speed as well. There's nothing we can do. Just wishing to cast the spell is enough. It's completely instinctive.'

After that, Jake remained silent for a while, lost in thought. The lvl0 was probably due to the fact that the effects were too limited. There was no freedom of action. The Kintharian bloodline was much more interesting in comparison.

In addition to being able to control the earth as if it were its own body, it could also generate heat and feed off various electromagnetic radiation. The possible spells were only limited by the caster's imagination. If Jake learned more about Aether manipulation, he could most certainly produce the same fireballs with this elemental bloodline affinity without learning any Aether runes.

The earth and the warm, bright environments nourished his body and also accelerated his recovery, making the Kintharian bloodline a balanced and versatile bloodline. By contrast, this Fireball skill was indeed a bit lacking.

'Still... I can at least check one thing.' Jake thought as he stared at the levitating fireball above Enya's palm.

'Let me try something.' Jake finally said as he put his hand under Enya's.