

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 202 - Anya's return

In the days that followed, Jake never once left his cabin. He thought that creating an Aethor Core would be somewhat easy and that he could then go out and look for an Aetherist on Thelma before participating in his second Ordeal, but he was wrong all along.

It was an extremely laborious and repetitive task, giving him awful headaches and making him feel like he was wasting his time with each failure. He knew it was normal and not his fault, but he couldn't help but be in a gloomy mood these last few days.

Since he knew that his Soul was formed and that his Extrasensory Perception field matched his Spirit Body, his Status indicated additional information about this.

[Soul: Unattributed, human.]

[Spirit Body lvl 1: Stable, but immaterial. Cannot affect the physical world and has no defense except the host's consciousness to resist external psychic influences.]

Those were the two additional pieces of information indicated by its status. When he had awakened his Seventh Stat, his soul was considered a Proto-Soul, which could be considered progress.

The Spirit Body did not have any Aether Stat per se, since it could be considered as the result of the fusion of his Blue and Purple Aether combined with his consciousness. In essence, it was an unstable entity

and Jake was unclear as to the difference between the Spirit Body and his Soul.

What he did know was that he would not die losing a piece of his Spirit Body, at most a significant amount of Aether. On the contrary, every injury to his Soul would do heavy damage to his psyche.

His first impression was that where his attention - and therefore his consciousness - was, his Soul could not be far away. In other words, when he was actively controlling the Aether around him to create his Aether Core, his Soul was literally stripped bare outside his body. It was the same when he had manipulated the earth with the Kintharian blood.

This explained why Aetherists would rather use Aether Cores to fight than the Aether around them. Unless they had an extremely powerful Spirit Body it was not advisable. Every out-of-body astral projection was to be avoided in hostile environments.

This was the reason why he didn't dare leave his cabin. He had initially considered continuing later, even attempting to create it during his second Ordeal, but now that he knew the risks he had to be careful.

Another thing he had understood about the Spirit Body and Soul was that the Aether of Intelligence improved the cognitive faculties, but the ability for self-control and willpower ultimately rested on a balance between the prefrontal cortex and the limbic and reptilian brains. The notion of Mental Force did not really exist and was totally abstract.

The Spirit Body represented this notion. A strong mind had a strong spirit body. And this Mental Force was what moved the Aether around doing miracles. It was a force of another nature that no scientist could measure.

Untiringly over the next few days, he collected more Aether and compressed it as much as he could, to no avail. Each time he would try to hold on a little longer and compress the Aether sphere a little more, but his attempts were ultimately a bitter failure. He had long since lost count of his failed attempts.

These efforts were not in vain, though. Even if it didn't make much difference in terms of his stats, his Spirit Body or his Soul, his Intelligence and perseverance were still there.

With each attempt, he became more skillful in his Aether manipulation and he became increasingly adept at resisting the migraines that tormented him. With his memory and his present understanding abilities he could easily learn from his failures, and he progressed rapidly.

Ir ovu guearrare vu jfl hfzudpi ar val vfrtiare md ovu Auovuz. Aijfwl qfcare lpzu om hmqnzull ovu Auovuz dzmq ovu mpolatu frt rmo dzmq ovu arlatu. Hu hmpit epatu fii md val Rut Auovuz Fmzhu arom val dareuz, gpo vu rusuz qakut lphv f vaev hmrhurozfoamr md Rut Auovuz jaov val Snazao Bmtw. Hu hmpit duui ovfo val Snazao Bmtw jfl omm dzfai dmz ovfo.

On the other hand, the further he extended his Extrasensory Perception away from his body, the more his Spirit Body was distended and therefore thin, becoming more and more ethereal.

His spirit was at its strongest when it remained well enclosed within his physical brain. This remained the ideal place to think and act normally and had the merit of being doped and strengthened by the action of the Yellow and Green Aether of Constitution and Vitality.

The other positive effect was that by exposing his body to these repeatedly compressed Aether spheres, his body was tempered a bit by them. His Body stats, which had not budged for weeks, were

finally showing slight signs of progression and had also raised their tolerance threshold to Aether.

Six or seven days later, while Jake was stuck in a psychological struggle between his mind and a shiny Aether sphere barely bigger than a fly's head, he received a notification from the System that someone was waiting at the entrance to his cabin. By checking the identity of the newcomer with his bracelet, he was able to confirm that it was his cousin.

'Is she back already? Don't tell me she really intends to give me 10,000 Aether points?' He grinned as he wiped the sweat from his forehead with his sleeve.

Dripping with sweat, he intended to activate the vortex to let her in when he realized he reeked like a dead rat.

When was the last time I took a shower?' Jake wondered earnestly with furrowed brows.

[Not a single one since the end of your Ordeal.] Xi answered in his place in a mocking tone.

Since she had a hologram portraying her, she was beginning to behave and express herself in a more human way. For example, she was standing on the floor sideways with her cheek wedged against the palm of her right hand and was eating virtual potato chips while watching Jake's unsuccessful attempts as if it were the most captivating series.

She couldn't eat, of course, but thanks to Jake's memories she could reproduce the taste, smell and texture and it was almost the same.

Hearing her sarcastic remark, Jake undressed in a hurry and jumped into the shower without worrying about Xi's gaze. After all, she knew

everything about him from the first second he had received his bracelet.

He had a few spare clothes, but sadly he had no solution for his worn-out, punctured boots. At this point it might have been better for him to walk barefoot. It would be less ridiculous.

Anya knew he was in his cabin thanks to his Shadow Guide and patiently stood in front of his cabin with her arms folded, rhythmically tapping her foot to wait for him to open the door. About ten minutes later, the metal wall in front of her liquefied to form a vortex and she was able to discover her cousin's minimalist booth.

When she discovered the 20 square meter room with no furniture except for a toilet and a shower, she couldn't help but sympathize. However, the rancid smell of sweat in the room was strong enough to burn her nostrils and make her retreat.

Thank goodness she knew how to control herself and pinched her nose a few seconds before entering with a determined step. Jake, who had finished getting dressed and still had his hair dripping wet, pretended he didn't notice anything and hugged his cousin as if nothing had happened.

She was wearing a standard dark military uniform, but it wasn't a combat uniform. Her hair was tied up in a ponytail and her minimalist makeup made her look stern and hard to approach.

Ending the hug, Anya looked straight at him in the eye and said:

‘You know why I'm here, Jake.’

‘No, I don't.’

He'd decided to play dumb until she spilled the beans. Seeing his bad faith answer, Anya wanted to slap him around like she did when they were younger but eventually she decided to show her maturity.

'I got the 10,000 Aether points you wanted. Now, you have to follow me to New Earth to make your second Ordeal. If you don't want to share your results with the government, you can at least do it with the family to please Grandpa and Uncle. '

Jake had asked for 10,000 Aether points to make her give up a week earlier, but he realized he'd asked for too little after his fight with the Horde. A more experienced Evolver could certainly earn that amount in no time. Even if his cousin depended on a salary and bonuses from her missions, it was more than feasible.

However, while Jake had many faults, he always kept his promises. At least he was making her happy, and he was still earning 10,000 Aether points anyway.

'I agree to follow you.' Jake spoke calmly as he glued his bracelet to hers for the Aether transfer. ' However, whether I do my Ordeal with my family, publicly or privately will depend on my judgment once I'm on New Earth. In any case, if you or uncle Kalen want to know my Ordeal results you only have to ask. '