

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 255 - To help or not to help?

A mass of silvery hair streaked with golden strands emerged on the surface of the water, followed by a young, thoughtful face that exposed a row of translucent fangs as he drew a deep breath. His eyelids were slightly squinted and his eyeballs moved imperceptibly to record every detail of the scenery.

‘Hmmm? Hey, did someone call me?’ Jake muttered as he inspected the body of water around him.

The island was so far away that the palm trees at the edge of the jungle were virtually indistinguishable from each other. The sky was empty of any flying birds or dinosaurs and even the murky water in which he was swimming had been practically deserted by its former occupants. It was highly unlikely that a human had called out his name.

‘Maybe I just daydreamed...’ He shrugged with a small laugh.

[You were not dreaming.] Xi intervened in a formal tone. [The bracelet did record a sound from your hearing. After analysis and comparison with old data, it is 99% certain that it was Tim’s voice, and at the tremolo it contained, he was probably in a state of extreme agitation, probably panic.

Jake raised his eyebrows when he heard this report, but looking at the island in the distance, there was nothing he could do. Even if he used his telekinesis to reach the shore as quickly as possible, he would then have to face many dangers to find the child.

In another context and if he had been closer to the shore, he wouldn’t have minded giving a hand, but in his present situation it was extremely restrictive.

‘Should I go back or not?’ Jake hesitated reluctantly.

It had only been a few hours since he had started farming preys on the open ocean, and he was far from having accomplished the goals he had set for himself. Finding prey worthy of him wasn’t as easy as it had been during the first trial.

Here, the sea monsters were no longer the products of a simulation, but real living beings with their own motivation and a pronounced survival instinct. If they were not hungry, they were more likely to be ignored by predators, unless they had a territorial character or were of a particularly ferocious nature.

However, this did not mean that he had not achieved any results. He had defeated a school of jellyfish, several white sharks, as well as a small megalodon about fifteen meters long and a group of swordfish determined to impale it.

The only problem was that finding these preys had taken him a considerable amount of time and they were generally smaller than what he was used to during his first trial. In addition to being physically weaker, their Aether stats appeared to be calibrated to the Aether density of 40 characterizing this Second Ordeal.

On this aspect, the sea monsters of his first trial were clearly superior. The first megalodon that he had faced in his first trial, for example, was more than 20 meters long, its skin was covered with an incredibly tenacious layer of stony material, and the quantity of Aether inside the creature slightly exceeded the Aether density of this world, closer to 50 than 40 points.

With these opponents being too weak and unchallenging, his Aether stats had barely improved, but he was able to confirm that defeated enemies now gave Aether upon their death.

However, earning one Aether point per stat over the 100-point limit still allowed him to increase his advantage over the average Players. He didn't know how many players had Aether stats over 100 points, but unless they had a high grade bloodline like his, it shouldn't be that common.

His real concern was that his Myrtharian bloodline largely owed its Grade to its growth potential. Right now, it wasn't that strong. Compared to a normal human, it was certainly a godsend, but compared to bloodlines sacrificing potential for an immediate gain in strength, it was a little too light.

For example, there was a Grade 2 bloodline in the Oracle Store called 'The Tank,' whose only particularity was to confer the passive property 'Increased Toughness lvl 1' to the Aether of Constitution of its holder. This did not overcome the limit of 100 Aether points, but multiplied by almost 5 the physical resistance that each point of Aether Constitution brought.

In the long run, if the holder of the bloodline remained unable to overcome this threshold, the effect of the bloodline would gradually become negligible when the other participants became strong enough to rival this ability. But for the time being at least, this made these Evolvers unquestionably tenacious.

This benefit was nevertheless limited if the body did not follow. For example, with his Myrtharian Body, Jake had a body that was twice as strong as normal, which was equivalent to doubling each of his stats. In this area alone, his bloodline surpassed this Grade 2 bloodline.

However, this changed once this Grade 2 bloodline advanced to Grade 3. Some bloodlines could advance one Grade at the same time as they increased one level. This happened when a new Bloodline Skill was unlocked during the process.

This 'Tank' bloodline had the chance to possess a Grade 3 version, and in addition to multiplying the physical resistance by 10 instead of 5, it gave a second property to the Aether of Constitution called 'Shield' whose passive

effect covered the skin of its owner with a thin layer of energy protecting it from impacts, heat and radiation.

The renewal of this shield was slow and the energy it contained was limited, but this could definitely allow such a competitor to go very far in this Second Ordeal.

To give an element of comparison, if Jake had had such a bloodline when Lamine and Yerode had ambushed him by surprise, he could probably have withstood the shots from Lamine's sniper without suffering the slightest scratch.

In the end, the Grade of a bloodline was only an indicator. No bloodline or Aether Skill could be considered perfect. It depended mainly on the context of each individual and the benefits to be gained from it.

[[You should at least see if he's okay.] Xi suddenly interrupted his reflection, while her hologram appeared in front of him walking on the water.

Jake, who was lost in thought, grunted in response, but he did not object. After all, considering the length of this trial, checking on the child's well-being would only take a tiny fraction of his time.

In addition, there was a simple way to check on Tim's well-being. Using the Oracle System, he wished to locate the child and his Shadow Guide quickly began pointing in the direction of the child's location.

[He's on the move...] Xi commented in a nonchalant tone.

'And he's going rather fast...' Jake added, with pursed lips. At that speed and considering his cry of distress earlier, he was clearly being chased by something.

Checking the Player Rankings with a glance, he remembered that almost all of his comrades were also on the island. If his attempt to seek Jake's help had

failed, chances were he had now turned his attention to Sarah, Will, or one of his cousins.

Jake didn't really believe in this last possibility, but he knew that the child was in love with Lily, his youngest cousin, and that he had blended in well at the Wilderths' mansion during the few days preceding the Ordeal. With some luck, it was not absurd to imagine he was getting along well with some of them.

To say how much Jake didn't care about his family, he hadn't even bothered to check if his cousins were on the island. Thank goodness he didn't have to. When he tried to locate Sarah, he discovered that Tim was running precisely in that direction.

'Oh... I'm amazed. I thought I was pretty original here...' Jake sighed as he saw where the young woman was. The Shadow Guide was pointing to the ocean, several kilometers off the island. The island was more or less spherical, so she was not that far from him if the Shadow Guide pointed straight to the ocean alongside him.

[No, that makes sense.] Xi retorted as if it was obvious. [She has the Myrmidian bloodline, which shares a lot in common with yours. She finished her second trial shortly after you, so it's clear to me that your course is similar and that you approach the Ordeal in the same way. Like you, she must intend to boost her Aether stats and get better Soul Glyphs after having stagnated during the first two trials.]

Thinking about it for a few seconds, Jake had to admit that this reasoning made sense. If Sarah had handled the first trial exactly as he did, it was only natural that she would have drawn the same conclusions. Their bloodlines were extremely similar, which reinforced that probability.

'In this case, I just have to swim in Sarah's direction. That will kill two birds with one stone. Anyway, at the speed Tim is running at, it is impossible for

me to catch him in such a short time. 'He concluded with a satisfied look on his face. It was the best compromise he could come up with.