

The Oracle Paths

Volume 4: The Purgatory

Chapter 374 - Last-Minute Preparation

It took only a few minutes for everyone to reach Jake's Island and finish their preparations.

Like Jake, all his companions had purchased the Oracle Space Storage Skill at the end of their Second Ordeal, but a lesser version with a fixed volume of one cubic meter. Their repeated encounters against other better prepared Players such as the Krishs or Nosks had made them realize how crucial this bracelet feature was.

Their Second Ordeal proved to them that even with a high Oracle Rank, a comfortable identity or privileges in terms of social status or Blessings was not always guaranteed. The beginning of an Ordeal could even be extremely chaotic. The first simulation in the ocean left them with a bitter aftertaste.

The only exception in the group was Kyle. Unfortunately, he had been eliminated too early and had only received the minimum reward of 100 credits. As ashamed as the Playboy felt, he had to accept the sad truth that he was the poorest and weakest of the group. Even Tim and Will had surpassed him.

His Oracle Rank 4 of Corporal was also the lowest in the group. Apart from Esya who was only a Rank 5 Sergeant, Sarah was a Rank 6 Staff Sergeant, Tim, Kevin, Vincent and Lily were Rank 7 First Class Sergeant, while Will and Enya had even reached Rank 8 First Sergeant.

He had a lot to be embarrassed about. The children in particular could be very cruel. Tim and Lily loved to rub salt in the wound by comparing their rank to his.

When Sarah arrived, Jake noticed for the first time that her irises were no longer yellow as before, but orange. It was a detail he hadn't paid attention to when they came back from their Ordeal, but it was now obvious that the color of her eyes had changed.

Now that he had noticed this detail, all the incongruities became obvious to him quite naturally. Her ears were a bit sharper, her canines were longer and her red varnish was not enough to hide the existence of her claws. Because of the influence of the Myrtharian Body skill, these changes had gone unnoticed.

"You have assimilated the bloodline of a Chaos Zhorion?" Jake asked rhetorically. It was more of a statement than a question.

Sarah had been eliminated during her third trial in the Chaos Tribe City. Such a reward made sense.

"If you know why ask?" Sarah replied harshly. But after saying this, she immediately regretted it and lowered her head before walking away from him.

Perhaps out of feminine solidarity, Enya and Esya rolled their eyes and ran after Sarah without saying a word. If before he wasn't sure that Sarah was giving him the cold shoulder, now he was convinced of it.

Inside, Jake was seething with rage, but he repressed the emotion. He may have been antisocial, but he certainly wasn't fooled. With Xi's constructive remarks, he had a good understanding of Sarah's conduct.

Whether she had an inferiority complex about him, saw him as a rival, a potential sexual partner, or was menstruating, she was wrong if she thought she could hook him by playing hard to get and behaving obnoxiously.

[Give her a chance.] Xi whispered gently to him. [Like Kyle, the Myrmidian bloodline negatively influences her emotions, but it will calm down when she realizes that she's acting like an idiot and that you're not her enemy. Remember that by refusing her overt advances, you have hurt her ego. If she was your woman, taking advantage of you wouldn't be as embarrassing. Not everyone has a pragmatic view of the world like Will. If you want to solve the problem once and for all, you need to man the fuck up. That's what she wants.]

'All right, but not now. She better pulls her shit together fast. If she behaves like that in the next Ordeal, it will penalize us all.'

Jake knew he could sometimes act cold and appeared difficult to talk about, but he considered himself honest. If he had something to say he would say it face to face and had no time to waste with these mind games.

In fact, he loathed those who did so. If Sarah persisted, she would ruin the good opinion he had of her.

"We have to upgrade the faction before we can start." Will tactfully reminded him after witnessing the exchange between Sarah and Jake.

"Right..."

Jfcu dazlo gmpevo f 10q latu Rut Cpgu dmz 1M Auovuz nol, jvahv vu nifhut guojuur ovu Bipu frt Yuiimj Cpgul. Tvur vu mnurut ovu Ffhoamr arouzdfhu om hvuhc ovu nzmqmoamr hmrtaoamrl.

He was fairly surprised to discover that the Faction Aether Storage contained almost 11.5M Aether pts. He felt somewhat embarrassed when he realized that he hadn't contributed a single point. Most of the contributed points came from the two subfactions Myrtharian Scavengers and The Aristocats.

Anyway, the conditions for upgrading the faction had already been met. He spent 1M Aether pts to upgrade it to level 2, then 10M to upgrade it to level 3.

Although he already had the Oracle Rank required to reach level 4, he was unfortunately short of Aether and had to stop there. He had to save the rest for unexpected situations.

[Faction Name: Myrtharian Nerds]

[Faction level: Lvl3 (Promotional conditions: 100M Aether pts, Oracle Rank of Master Sergeant or higher)]

[Number of members: 24/200 (11 human, 12 feline and 1 baby dragon)]

[Faction Aether Storage: 598,356pts]

[Aether production: 0 pts/s]

[Faction Skills:]

[Permanent Passive Skill: Myrtharian Body (20% (10>20% or +5% per level) of the leader's capacity): Body stats boosted by 80%.]

[Faction Space Vault lvl3: 40 (10>40, double with each level) cubic meters of common storage space accessible to authorized members and which can be compartmentalized into several blocks depending on the level of authorization and trust. Activation cost: 100 000 Aether pts/day. The daily cost can be shared by the faction's members.]

[Vitality Link lvl3: Allows the temporary transfer of member vitality to the Skill Activator. An injury can also be transferred to another member with its agreement. Cost: 800 000 (1M> 800 000 or -100 000 per level) Aether points per minute.]

[Main Floating Island affiliate: 4]

[Subfactions: Myrtharian Scavengers, The Aristocats.]

Much to his regret, their faction did not unlock any additional skill faction, but the three available skills had been significantly enhanced, and he realized that he had negatively impacted his comrades by waiting so long to deal with it.

The upgrade of the Myrtharian body especially would have benefited them immeasurably and speeded up their training. It was a stupid mistake that he could only blame on selfishness and neglect. He promised himself that he would not delay such decisions in the future.

Will instantly smiled with delight when he opened the updated Faction interface. He suddenly clapped his hands to get everyone's attention. It was only then that Sarah and the two sisters quietly joined the group under Jake's chilling gaze.

"It's only 7:00 a.m. and we still have an hour before our Third Ordeal begins. "Will announced before calling them to open their interface. " I urge you all to memorize the three Faction Skills and the contents of the Faction Storage Vault, which I hope will help us deal with even the most unexpected situations. I would also like to thank Jake, who, I remind you, spends 100,000 Aether pts every day to keep the Faction Storage Vault up and running."

"If someone has less than 800,000 Aether pts, speak out now or you will be unable to use the Vitality Link in case of serious injury. It's not just for you, but for others as well. If you lose consciousness and are unable to activate this skill, it will be up to another of your companions to activate it instead."

Tim, Daniel, Kyle, and Lily exchanged embarrassed looks and raised their hands. Jake was already on the defensive, but to his astonishment Will transferred 800,000 Aether pts from his own pocket to each of them. Seeing Jake's incomprehension, Will explained,

"Felines have been hunting daily on B842 since they joined us. What they do not eat they deposit it in the Faction Vault. I then take care of selling it and keep 10% of the profit as the middle man. The rest goes back to the Aristocats."

Jake's mouth opened wide as he learned the ins and outs of the matter. He then rushed to his cat Crunch who was frolicking with a huge familiar-looking leopard and grabbed his wristband to access his Aether Storage.

Seeing his pet's immense fortune, he drew a cold breath. This stupid cat was richer than him! Admittedly, he had less than 50M of Aether pts left, but it was still a traumatic blow. He had to resist his impulses with all his strength so as not to rob him of everything.

The two reasons why he held out was that Crunch was no longer the same stupid cat depending on him for survival, but also because when he discovered his Oracle Status he

realized that his cat was now a formidable opponent. Who was the stronger between the master and the pet was unclear.

"Fine..." Jake grumbled with a downcast look on his face before returning to listen to Will's encouraging speech.

The businessman had almost finished and was doing a quick recap of the functions of some of the tools stored in the Faction Vault. For the first time, Jake took a personal interest in the Vault in question and even he was momentarily moved by Will's meticulous preparation work.

Survival rations, meat and blood from Rank 6 Digestors, two tons of water, oxygen tanks, diving suits, spacesuits, firearms of all kinds and several tons of ammunition. There were also tents, mosquito repellent, cooking gear and all the necessary equipment to survive in the wilderness. There were even some gold and silver bars, a bag full of small crystals and some precious stones.

It seemed that after his Second Ordeal experience, the businessman had vowed never to experience such frugality again. All they had to do was pray that their Faction Space Vault would remain accessible during their next Ordeal.

A few minutes before the opening of the Red Cube, a tense silence settled in the middle of the group. They could still laugh and joke happily a moment earlier, but now reality was catching up to them.

Kwiu ulnuhafiiw, jfl lvasuzare liaevoiw, eflnare dmz gzufv fit val vufzo jfl zfhare. Hu vft imre hmrtaoamrut vaqluid quofiiw rmo om easu pn, usur ad vu vft om urhmprouz fefar ovmlu luf qmlrouzl ovfo vft easur vaq lm qfrw raevoqfzul. Bpo fo ovu fnnzmfhv md ovu dfoudpi qmquro, fii val nzunfzfoamrl duio suzw dpoaiu.

He was terrified!

Suddenly, a large hand patted his shoulder. As he turned around, he recognized Jake's indifferent face protruding half a meter above him.

"It's okay to be afraid. "He said calmly, "You failed once, so what? You fought those fucking ugly Space Digestors for a month just for this moment. I mean, seriously, is there anything worse you could come across?"

Right... At worst he would die again. His performance could hardly be worse than the previous one. After these few words from Jake, Kyle stopped shaking and finally managed to relax.

Jake also went to reassure Tim and Lily on Xi's advice, but deliberately avoided Sarah as she was still ignoring him.

'Fucking idiot.' He tsked inwardly.

The remaining minutes flew by in a blink and suddenly the Red Cube started flashing on high frequencies and a deafening war siren rang out throughout his Floating Island.

The Third Ordeal was about to begin.