

The Oracle Paths

Volume 5: The Last Tutorial

Chapter 506 - Awful Naming Sense

Jake immediately recognized the most prominent felines, especially the titanic lion and tiger, which at this point could only be described as behemoths. The two creatures were over 20 meters long and a little over 7 meters at the withers, towering over the other felines in the group who were in no way small.

Because of the Myrtharian Body Passive, their fur had darkened slightly with occasional golden and silver shimmers reverberating off the light of the Aether Sun Core. The long claws and fangs were translucent and hard as diamonds, making them formidable predators. Their fur soaked in Digestor's blood was the blatant proof of this.

Behind these two leaders, he also recognized the leopard Crunch was vainly trying to conquer, as well as the rest of the pride composed of 4 lionesses, 1 cheetah, 1 black panther, a lynx and a Siamese cat.

Because of their meteoric evolution, Jake was entirely relying on morphological criteria and not their size to determine their species. Crunch, originally a small alley cat, was now the size of a full-grown pachyderm and even slightly larger than the leopard he was trying to court.

Yet their faction's tally indicated only 12 felines and he counted 16. There were four more than he expected.

These four felines at the back of the group were more shy and easily recognizable. Smaller than their fellow felines, these four cats had

bàrèly begun their evolution. Their journey must have been bumpy after their arrival on B842 because they were rather famished except for a European cat that was about the size of a Saint Bernard.

If he was not mistaken, these cats had been saved by coincidence during their hunt. And sure enough, the giant lion immediately confirmed his suspicions.

‘Hello Jake. Glad to see that the Ordeal went well. We felt the changes in the Myrtharian Body Passive.’ The feline sat majestically on his hindquarters and with a wag of his paw the other felines did the same with the exception of Crunch who waddled preposterously to his master.

‘Glad to hear it.’ Jake replied politely, while simultaneously raising his leg to stop the huge black cat dead in its tracks.

Crunch’s vertical pupils narrowed excitedly at his master’s cautious reaction and his playful spirit was ignited. Suddenly speeding up, he began to feint, leaping from left to right to get past his guard and tackle him to the ground, but his only reward for his efforts was a resounding downward slap from his master after a sidestep and a sharp twist of the chést.

Having struck with his full weight, the huge cat’s mouth slammed into the ground, generating a small shock wave. Jake winced as he felt a sharp pain on the side of his palm and upon inspection he discovered several hairs as sharp and pointy as rapiers embedded a few millimeters into his flesh.

‘Tsk, Crunch when are you going to stop doing that?’ Jake reprimanded him sternly, pinching his huge ear. ‘If I were a normal human I’d be dead already. I sometimes wonder if you’re trying to kill me to end your Pet Contract.’

Far from looking guilty or repentant, the cat yawned long and hard, invoking the fury of his master. Seeing Jake's anger, a victorious glint flashed in his slitted yellow eyes.

Realizing he wasn't being taken seriously, Jake gave up his lecture and used a much more direct method. Connecting his bracelet to his cat's, he wordlessly drew half of his Aether, amounting to 62M Aether points.

If at first it was just a joke to remind the cat who was in charge, he continued unabashedly upon realizing that his cat was pretty well off. The hunt while they were away must have been good, because his cat had only two-thirds of that fortune a day earlier.

That meant that without attending an Ordeal, his cat had earned over 40M Aether in one day. That was quite the accomplishment.

'You robbed a bank?' Jake inquired without hiding his incomprehension.

'It was Mufasa who gave us our allowance this morning.' Crunch boasted proudly as he puffed out his chest, not forgetting to give his master a hurt look.

'Mufasa?' Jake almost choked on his spit upon hearing the name.

'Who picked these names?'

The man named Mufasa, who was none other than the huge lion, sagely explained,

'It was Lily and Tim. They told us that these names were very famous and would bring us respect and adoration from the humans.'

Jake facepalmed as he heard the reason. Faced with Mufasa's solemn and dignified expression, he did not have the nerve to tell him that his name came from a dead lion in a children's cartoon.

Still, after hearing that name, he got a bad feeling and felt compelled to ask the names of the others, much to his regret. Reality had surpassed fiction.

The giant tiger was named Shere Khan, the female leopard Duchess, the lynx Toulouse, the cheetah Thomas'O Malley, the black panther Bagheera, the Siamese cat Berlioz and the four lionesses Nala, Kiara, Sarabi and Zira.

Noticing Jake's cringe face, Mufasa and Shere Khan sensed something was wrong, but fortunately their reading of human expressions was not perfect. Once Jake had suppressed his urge to laugh, he regained his usual composure.

After that, he talked for a few minutes with the felines, the most evolved among them now being able to carry on a conversation, and learned how the Aristocats worked.

Mufasa was the leader and Shere Khan the vice-leader. Of the four lionesses, Sarabi was the most respected, while Crunch and the cheetah Thomas'O Malley were considered troublemakers, causing problems wherever they went.

The cheetah in particular had acquired unimaginable speed and even Mufasa had trouble catching him when he was launched at full gallop.

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Even if he gave everything he had in a fight to the death, Jake still couldn't defeat the lion, but if he improved a little more he might have a chance.

And the Purgatory's purpose was just that: To make him stronger.

After learning that none of the felines had taken part in their fourth Ordeal yet, he agreed with them to bring them with him next time. By then he would surely have acquired adequate space skills to take one or more of the creatures with him, while Will sorely needed the help of these felines if he hoped to survive the next Ordeals.

Speaking of Will, Jake didn't want to embarrass him in front of the others, but he absolutely had to straighten something out with him. Using his bracelet he contacted him right away.

'Hey Will, why didn't you bring up your Charisma Aether Encoding earlier?' Jake questioned bluntly. 'I know you got Grade 2 after the Third Ordeal.'

Dead silence on the other side of the line. After a few seconds, Will sighed in disgrace and confessed,

'Because it was the only thing that made me even slightly unique and useful in the Ordeals. If everyone gets my Charisma Aether, then I'm back to being the weakest and most useless fighter in the group. I'm supposed to be the Vice-Leader... How am I supposed to get respect if even Tim can kill me with a snap of his finger.'

Jake understood his dilemma, but his concerns were pointless.

'While I understand how you feel, your feelings are irrelevant. Tim is doing well, but only because he's so lucky. Once you have 1,000 Luck Aether points, the difference between you two won't be so great. The same goes for your Strength, Agility and Constitution. You may not be the best fighter, but you definitely won't be the weakest. We can get your Charisma Aether, but not the Aether Skills you picked to maximize the potential of that stat.'

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‘I get it. Thanks Jake. I’ll announce it in the public Faction chat.’

‘One more thing Will...’

‘Yes, Jake?’

‘You’re the Vice Leader. You have this position because I trust you. And you know how fragile my trust is. Don’t give me a reason to doubt you and keep leading by example. If you don’t agree with my decisions, we can always talk about it, but if you keep doing this, it’s not just me you’ll be alienating. Kyle and the two sisters have certainly noticed your act.’

‘I know. It won’t happen again. I promise.’

The conversation came to a close and as promised Will announced in the chat that he was in possession of the Grade 2 Charisma Aether Encoding. The adults remained silent, with only the children daring to naively ask him why he had not told them earlier in the debriefing.

Jake didn’t like to hurt people’s feelings, much less exert his authority, but he had promised himself that he would be more involved with the Faction. If Will wasn’t up to the task, everyone would suffer. It could even put them in grave danger.

With these concerns out of the way, Jake took the Purgatory out of his Space Storage and at last began to study it seriously. Focused, he reviewed the artifact’s specs, then activated it with the fervent resolve to unlock all its secrets.

The time had come for him to understand the value of the Bronze Artifact in his hands.