

Testing

Zach rolled his shoulders as he tried to get accustomed to the armor. The spiritual tool was incredible in many ways, though, he understood that he would need to learn how to use it properly. Wearing it felt strange, he could feel it touching his soul, though not quite in a bad way. The armor itself felt like a second skin, the way it was built made it snug and it allowed him a full breadth of motion.

He jumped around lightly, swinging his arms in different directions trying to gauge just where the limits were. He could also feel that his balance was a lot better than without it. He pulled on the wind and flew around, flipping himself over the head. Somehow, he always had a sense of where exactly the ground was, and his body was more responsive to his input. He didn't know exactly how to explain it in words, but he still voiced his findings.

Naha, sitting on the ground next to him diligently wrote everything down. There were tests to be done, and limits to be discovered. Zach found himself smiling without meaning to. It had been a long time since he had something like this to explore. There was much to learn here.

“Anything else?” Naha asked as he spun around in the air.

Zach let himself fall to the ground. “Nothing else that I can tell.”

“Good,” Naha said. “Let's move on then.”

Zach nodded. With an effort of will, he made it disappear. As before, he felt it in his Soul. “It is back,” he said and Naha wrote. “Only now the

strange draining sensation is no longer present. It feels like an awakened item in that manner. I know that I can call on it at any time.”

“Pull it out again,” Naha said and Zach did as she asked.

Armor manifested around him again and she tilted her head. “Any delay?”

“None, it is instant, the moment I thought about equipping it, it appeared,” Zach answered.

Naha noted that down and then looked up at him. “I think that is all the basic stuff, you want to move to the Linked portion?”

Zach nodded, then focused on the armor. Immediately, a window appeared in his vision, filling his eyes with text and numbers. He grimaced, it had grown since last time, the lines of text had multiplied. What it was showing him now was all the Essences currently in the core, which were... a lot. All the Essences around them were present, and Zach had been unaware just how many of them were always present.

There were hundreds of them. He focused on the window, trying to change the way in which it showed him the information. With some tinkering, he managed to make it so that it showed only the top 5 Essences by amount in the core.

Core capacity: 21%/100%

Essences Present:

—**Air Essence**—**2.1%**—**+0.21** to resistance and effectiveness

—**Light Essence**—**1.8%**—**+0.18** to resistance and effectiveness

—**Wind Essence**—**1.7%**—**+0.17** to resistance and effectiveness

—**Earth Essence**—**1.2%**—**+0.12** to resistance and effectiveness

—**Nature Essence**—**0.8%**—**+0.08** to resistance and effectiveness

Most of the Essences weren't a surprise.

“Wind hadn't been in the top before I started using it for tests,” Zach said and Naha wrote down. “That makes sense, there was no Wind here before I started using my powers. Which meant that the armor could actually use the Essences from my abilities.”

“That might need some more testing,” Naha said. “I'll make a note for later.”

Zach agreed, they would need to do a lot more in-depth test to see how his ability use affected the armor absorption rate.

“It appears like it is drawing in all the Essence around me, the rate seems to be linked with the amount and strength of the Essence itself,” Zach said. He changed the screen again to see the full list, then he looked through it searching for a few Essences. He found them quickly, Gravity, Time, Space, all were represented, though they weren't as highly placed as most others. He wondered why that was. All that Essence was always present around. Well, that's what the testing was for.

“What are the percentages?” Naha asked, making him turn and focus on her.

He dictated the numbers, and she glanced at the timepiece next to her as she did some quick math.

“So,” she started once she was finished. “It took the armor 21 minutes to hit 21%. It seems like its rate of absorption is 1% per minute. That means that a full charge will take an hour at the passive rate.”

“I guess that we’ll see,” Zach said. They had already decided to get that out of the way first. They waited the hour, with him updating her every ten percent, giving her the new numbers. By the time the one hour hit, they had some more interesting data.

“Hm,” Naha frowned. “It looks like the dominant three Essences all topped out at 9%, with the next three all being at 6%, then 3%, then 1%, and the rest all decrease by 0.3%.”

Zach wasn’t sure if there was a significance to it, probably not. Just a quirk of the make or even the Framework itself. Still, there were a lot of Essences represented. Even some that were present as part of others, like Earth and Stone.

“I guess that we should do this test again in different territories, see if that changes,” Zach added.

“Agreed,” Naha said. “You ready for the next part?”

Zach turned his attention on the armor and triggered its purge ability. A familiar Essence washed out and over the armor, Oblivion. It purged the core, eating the Essence inside, then it spread through the armor itself and removed the Essences infusing it. The Oblivion then surged back into the two gemstones holding it. Zach halted the passive storage of Essence.

He took a deep breath and closed his eyes. He focused his mind on the Aspect of Time, opening up a link between himself and the plane. And then he triggered the storage of Time in the armor. He felt it surge into the core like a... like a river, and then infuse the rest of it.

“Oh,” he heard Naha said. “It changed color.”

Zach looked down and saw that she was right. The bone-colored armor now had a faint green tint to it. A few seconds later he felt the armor become fully infused and then everything changed.

His perception flipped, it was as if he was standing in the plane of Time. As if he was riding the River of Time itself. The effect he usually felt, granted to him by **Sage of Time**, felt a lot stronger. As if time itself was at the tip of his fingertips.

He pulled up the window and looked at it.

Core capacity: 100%/100%

Essences Present:

—Time Essence—100%—+20x to resistance and effectiveness

Essence Source—Time—Active

Idea of Time—Flowing River—Active

He twisted his wrist and had his gauntlet twist around into a hollow tube as he transformed his hand into the Blade of Time. It felt stronger, better somehow.

“I feel... strange,” Naha said from next to him. “I can tell that something is happening, like a... As if everything is changing from moment to moment. Is this what Time feels like?”

Zach glanced in her direction. Time was always present in the world, but most people never truly gave it any attention. Zach did, he felt it every moment of the day. He felt how the world changed from moment to moment, as Time flowed forward. Every moment was different than the last, it was often overwhelming, madness inducing.

“Naha?” Zach whispered.

Her eyes were blank, looking but not seeing.

“It moves so fast,” she whispered, her hand coming up as if trying to touch something. Zach stepped in her direction and—he was in front of her before he even took the step.

He blinked, unsure as to what had happened.

Naha raised her hand, grasping at the air. “It moves so fast.”

Zach tilted his head, he skipped back, he hadn't intended to. He knelt and touched Naha, and she snapped out of it, she looked at him and then he saw clarity return to her eyes.

She shook her head and he felt her activate her powers. "That was strange," she said.

"Yes," Zach agreed, that was what Time really was. An overwhelming force that kept moving forward. Not evenly, as proofed by his accidental skip, Time didn't flow at the same rate everywhere. He understood Time enough to know how he had skipped through it. His armor had become the Source of Time, it flowed at a rate that was different than the rate of Time around him. Though he could sense that the Time around them was catching up, his armor was enriching the baseline Time around him, bringing it up to the same rate. He wouldn't be able to skip like that for long.

"How does it feel," Naha asked, her hand moving back to her lap, ready to take notes.

"Like I am on the Plane of Time," Zach said, then explained it in more details.

One thing was for certain, he was going to need to do a lot more tests. This was... a boon beyond anything that he could've imagined. How easy it would be for him to study Essence now? He could literally feel the connection with the Plane, feel the meaning of Time.

He wished that he could just seclude himself for a thousand years. Spend all of that time just learning about Essence. But he knew that he had no time. They were preparing for their trip to the Ethereal, hoping to find the power and means of finding Ra'azel.

The yeti was more important than anything else, even Zach's desire for knowledge.