

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 179 - Revenge

With his Overloaded Aether Stats, Jake was definitely fast. Despite the lead of the other deserters, Jake caught up with them in a flash, overtaking them like a hurricane a few seconds later. Once assured that he had some cannon fodder in his back ready to serve as a distraction in his place, Jake heaved a deep sigh of relief.

That didn't stop him from racing at his top speed, though. Soon he caught up with the first fugitives, including the two former Ducal guards of the two princesses. Although they were older than the other soldiers, they were, to his surprise, almost as fast as he was. Either they had surpassed the 100-point limit, or their bodies were different from his. This was not impossible considering they came from another world.

When Jake passed them in turn, the eyes of the two gawking guards suddenly popped out as if they couldn't believe it. Where the hell did this guy come from?

Recognizing them, the two confused Princesses came to their senses and glared at their former bodyguards, hoping to intimidate them. Alas, their attempt at intimidation did not have the desired effect.

The two half-naked women, with tousled hair, were being carried around like two bags of flour on Jake's shoulders, and at that very moment their Princess presence was non-existent.

To be frank, a bystander spotting Jake fleeing with the two young women might have thought that he was in fact the kidnapper leaving with his two war trophies.

Regardless of his superior speed, luck was not with him that night. No sooner had he widened the gap a few meters with the two Ducal guards than the deafening roar of the Rank 7 abomination resounded again, uprooting a few trees a little too close by.

As if the Digestors' horde was on steroids, the Digestors chasing them suddenly gained speed, allowing even the ever-increasing Digestors of Rank 4 to suddenly catch up slowly.

The last to escape soon found themselves forced to defend their lives, and this short delay in blocking gave the other slower Digestors time to arrive in turn and overwhelm them.

At this level, the battles were fairly quick and within a few kilometers of escape only about ten stragglers were caught and then devoured by the horde. Worse, the howling of the Digestor Pterosaur seemed to have a rallying effect on all the Digestors nearby.

When Jake thought he was finally out of the woods, he had to brake hard, planting his feet deep into the ground and raising a cloud of dust, which shook the two Princesses on his shoulders. A little more and they would have gotten whiplash. Then he could have said goodbye to his rescue mission.

In front of him, another horde of Digestors was heading straight for them, blocking the shortest way back to the Oracle Shelter.

'Fuck!' Jake cursed as he gritted his teeth in nervousness.

Reacting accordingly, he turned 90 degrees to his left and in a blast sprinted in a new direction hoping to get around them before it was

too late. The two Ducal guards seemed to have had the same idea and decided to follow him.

‘Fuck off!’ Jake shouted at them as they chased after him. ‘Why don’t you go to the right?!’

Of course, both guards were extremely thick-skinned and made do with a sarcastic chuckle. Seeing their reaction, Jake was dying to put a bullet from his assault rifle into their heads at point-blank range, but that meant having to let go of the two Princesses.

‘Well, keep following me then, if you can.’ Jake muttered instead.

With the Digestor blood boosting his stamina and vitality he could afford to push his body beyond its limits. In other words, he could sustain a continuous sprint.

The reason why he was so careful was that it was psychologically very unpleasant to breathe like a blower with his heart beating to the rhythm of a gatling gun. The CO₂ levels would be elevated continuously, making him feel as if he was suffocating if he held his breath for more than a second.

Taking it upon himself, he forced himself to breathe as fast as he could as if he was trying to hyperventilate and contracted his muscles to accelerate accordingly. His blood pressure rose and his body temperature soared, activating all his body’s survival mechanisms to cool him down.

Human enzymes did not work well above 42°C because their three-dimensional structure would become loose. A high constitution could not change this, although it allowed his body to heat up less quickly, as his cells and molecules were less subject to agitation.

This meant that continuous sprinting was not only dependent on stamina, but also on temperature. If he exceeded this limit, he would collapse to the ground paralyzed until his body temperature dropped to a level where his enzymes became functional again. For a normal human, this meant death and that was why a fever of 42°C was life-threatening.

Fortunately, the weather was not very hot and the winds were so fast that the generated breeze was able to limit his overheating. In a few tens of seconds at more than 600 kilometers per hour he got so far ahead that the two Ducal guards were just dots on his back.

The second horde of Digestors had also been bypassed. Nothing stood between him and the Oracle Shelter anymore.

BANG! BANG!

By the time Jake's brain recorded the sound, his body had already collapsed into the ferns like a puppet whose wires had been cut. Crashing at 600 kilometers per hour was a force that no Airbag could absorb. And Jake didn't have an Airbag.

With the shock, Jake's arms released their grip on the two princesses and they were catapulted forward like in a shot put competition over fifty meters. Luckily, they managed to land properly in the grass after a few smooth rolls.

At last, Jake's brain registered the pain. An unbearable, stabbing pain in both of his knees. As he tried to get up, in addition to the pain, he realized that he couldn't get up, his lower legs couldn't support his weight.

Looking down, he discovered that a huge hole 3 centimetres in diameter had horizontally replaced his two kneecaps. His knees

were in a mess, the shredded and bloody flesh reminding him of the gravity of his plight.

‘...the fuck?’ Jake blurted out in confusion as he looked in the supposed firing direction.

The first bullet he had dodged by pure reflex, because he suddenly had a horrible feeling. Without being able to explain it, he had simply tilted his torso forward to avoid the shot.

But when he had finally figured out what had just happened, he was already on the ground with his two kneecaps in pieces. The Shadow Guide hadn’t reacted at all.

‘Who?’ Jake squinted trying to make out something in the dark and maybe because the world took pity on him, a red lightning bolt split a nearby tree, giving him the brightness he needed to identify who was responsible.

And when he did see them, he was stunned. Yerode and Lamine.

”My humiliation wasn’t enough for them?” Jake tried to think rationally despite the mess he was in. ‘To set up this ambush in such a short time, it means they probably followed me a few minutes after I left the Black Cube. If that’s the case...’

‘Fuck you Oracle! I’ll remember that.’ Jake cursed the mysterious entity playing with all of their lives like they were pawns on a chessboard.

The two mercenaries sighed with regret when they saw that Jake had survived, but according to Lamine this was the way it was planned. The first bullet was only a decoy to force Jake into the path of the second bullet, which posed no immediate danger to his life.

Lamine was tempted to finish him off, but Yerode forced his sniper down with his hand.

‘No need, he’s screwed. Look back. ‘Yerode pointed to the two hordes of Digestors rushing behind Jake. They’d be on them in less than a minute.

‘But according to my Shadow Guide, if I want to kill him, I have to keep attacking him. ‘ Lamine replied with mixed feelings in his voice.

Yerode shook his head in denial.

‘If we stay, our own chances of survival will be compromised. The Oracle can’t predict anything when it comes to Digestors, just as my Oracle Cloaking skill allowed you to deceive his Shadow Guide. We’re leaving. ‘

Lamine put away his sniper which was glowing with a strange golden halo, and then after taunting Jake one last time by mimicking the act of slitting his throat with a sardonic wink, the two mercenaries left, disappearing into the night.

As for Jake, he could only contemplate with a resigned expression the horde of Digestors rushing towards him.