

# The Oracle Paths

## Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

### Chapter 264 – Change of Plan

Returning unsuccessful, Jake's head protruded out of the ground with a disappointment that could not be concealed. Looking up, his eyeballs almost popped out when his gaze was caught directly by a tantalizingly captivating canyon. Sarah, unaware of his return, was standing right above him with a worried expression on her face, her legs slightly spread apart...

'Aaah!' Noticing the head sticking out of the ground, Sarah kicked it brutally by reflex, before leaping backwards, crossing her legs with indignation in order to hide her private parts.

With a dripping nose, Jake closed his eyes for a few seconds until the pain subsided before blowing his nose by squeezing each nostril with his thumb. A spurt of half clotted blood escaped from each nostril and a while later he was finally able to breathe properly again. The young woman's toenails on the other hand... deserved a chisel stroke. At this point, they were truly lethal weapons. If he hadn't moved slightly, she could very well have popped him in the eye.

Pulling himself up as if nothing had happened, Jake crossed his arms in a nonchalant pose before simply refocusing the discussion on what truly mattered.

'He's gone. 'He announced solemnly. 'No matter how hard I run after him with my Shadow Guide, I still can't meet the alien you've described. He is already far away.'

'Phew!'

Sarah and especially Tim heaved a long sigh of relief when they heard the good news. For Sarah it was just a tough opponent who had thwarted her plans for the day, but for the child it was the end of an endless nightmare. Joining Jake was the right choice.

‘If you don’t mind, I’m going to continue whatever I was doing...’ Jake babbled, his eyes wandering. He wasn’t that embarrassed by his appearance or theirs, but he wasn’t comfortable with it.

Furthermore, being a bodyguard wasn’t his primary aspiration either. Saving them from time to time or giving them a helping hand to assist them was still acceptable, but sacrificing his progress by putting up with two deadweights throughout the third trial was out of the question. On this point, he had not changed much. Moral, fair, but still somewhat selfish and individualistic.

‘Can we stay with you?’ Tim asked with hopeful stars in his eyes. After his misadventures, he knew when to cling to a lifeline at all costs. If he let go of Jake’s thigh, he was sure to relive the same hell over and over again.

Sarah wasn’t particularly against Jake’s proposal, but she was worried about the child. If Jake really refused to stay with them, she would have no choice but to stay with the boy. And if an enemy like this alien attacked them again, they might not be so lucky.

‘It doesn’t bother me that much.’ Sarah interjected calmly. ‘But, this alien was not alone. After this failure, he may call for reinforcements. For that reason alone, it’s best not to split up.’

She had a point. That was the main reason she wasn’t so excited about going back hunting on her own. No matter how big the island was, if one didn’t have one of the highest Oracle Ranks on the island or an Oracle Cloaking device, it was impossible to hide forever. It was ok if the other Players were unaware of their existence, but via the Player Ranking and the recollection of their appearance it was extremely easy to formulate an Oracle Path to track them down.

When Jake heard this argument, he frowned, but he didn't immediately decline. It was a valid reason. Having the highest Oracle Rank in the trio, and knowing that the alien had two comrades according to Tim's testimony, he requested to find his first and then his second ally separately. He had enough details about their physical appearance to make an accurate wish.

Urlpznzaloreiw, ovu Svftmj Gpatu guefr nmaroare ar f huzofar tazuhomr, àllpzare vaq ovfo ovu Ozfhiu Rfrc md mru md ovu movuz ojm fiaurl jfl rmo lpnuzamz om val mjr, gpo jvur vu ozaut om imhfou ovu luhmrt, ovu Svftmj Gpatu tat rmo fnnufz. Ciufziw, uaovuz ovu Ozfhiu Rfrc md mru md ovu fiaurl jfl vaevuz ovfr val, mz ao vft fr fhullmzw mz gzfhuio dprhoamr ovfo fimmjut ao om hmprouz oval ozfhcare.

In other words, if this alien, who was bound to be the strongest of this trio, decided to ambush him, he had no way to hide, nor could he plan anything against this individual. His only hope remained a frontal confrontation, but there again this enemy would have the advantage of being able to anticipate his movements via its Shadow Guide. Unless he had overwhelming physical and technical superiority, it was a fight he could not win.

'Fuck!' he snorted as he realized that this brief altercation had literally screwed up all his plans. By abandoning Tim and Sarah, he was also putting himself in great peril.

'What race was it?' Jake asked abruptly, as he recalled Tim's description.

With enough clues, he might be able to identify them through the Player Ranking.

'No idea...' The child shrugged his shoulders with a wry smile. 'But they had a strange way of communicating. A kind of compulsive krishkrishkrish sound that was horribly unpleasant to listen to.'

‘Oh?’ Jake eyes lit up. It turned out that three of the top Players in the rankings matched that profile. With a leader with an Oracle Rank of at least 6, it wouldn’t be shocking at all that they could be ranked so high.

After all, to get such an Oracle Rank after only one Ordeal, one would have to accumulate more than 400 rating points if the Player had not slaughtered a significant amount of Digestors beforehand.

If Jake knew more about the Ordeals’ reward conditions, he probably could have eliminated Digestors until he secured a Rank 4 before entering the Red Cube for the first time. The number of points required to reach these ranks were not too high and with 300 rating points he would have gained three more ranks, allowing him to move up to Rank 7.

In hindsight, this was surely the method used by the Earth Government to give a decisive advantage to their elite troops. With sufficient military and technological support, it was not difficult to reach Oracle Rank 4 or 5.

Nusuzovuiull, ad vu vft om tm ao msuz fefar, vu nzmgfgiw jmpit vfsu qftu ovu lfqu hvmahul. Rfrc 4 Daeulomzl juzu rmo lm zfzu mr B842 frt ao mriw ommc mru gft urhmprouz om urt pn fl Qmrlouz nmmn. Art priacu ovu dazlo Oztufil, ovu tufovl mr B842 juzu darfi.

Some lucky Players like Lu Yan had the additional privilege of having a starting Oracle Rank higher than the rest of the population. Either because they had an exceptional talent that the Oracle System acknowledged or because they had accomplished something before that had allowed them to get bonus points. Seen like that, an Oracle Rank 6 or 7 was not that great.

Thinking long and hard about all the possibilities, Jake remained silent for several minutes, pacing back and forth before abruptly changing the subject.

‘By the way, why are you covered in mud?’

It was a question he had been wondering about for some time. At first, he thought the chase had forced them to wade through mud, but their story didn't mention crossing a swamp, and the dry jungle floor was evidence that it hadn't rained for several days. From the way the partially dried mud was spread, this was probably intentional.

'It was Sarah's idea.' Tim remarked without further explanation.

Turning his sight to the young woman, she then explained how she had managed to get through her second trial.

'You're saying that just by covering yourself with soil and moistening it with sea water, you managed to spend a night on the island?' Jake repeated in awe.

'That's right.'

Not one to settle for a vague statement, Jake scanned the soil and seawater with his bracelet before coming up with a theory. He already knew that the jungle floor contained traces of Flintium, Orxanium and Naequat. He had thought the quantities of Naequat were insufficient, but apparently this seemed to have a protective effect sufficient to neutralize the action of the other two minerals.

Al dmz ovu luf jfouz, larhu val fzzasfi mr ovu alifrt vu vft rmo ruutut om frfiwxu ao frt ovu lhfr aqqutafoui w hmrdaZqut jvfo vu ovmpevo. Tvuzu juZu rmru md ovu ovZuu qaruzfil ar ovu mhufR luhoamr vu vft lhfrut, gpo ovu zunmzo artahfout ovfo oval jfouz vft guur zuepifziw uknmlut om zftafoamr dzmQ f vpeu Nfuypfo tunmlao.

Remembering the huge block of metal at the bottom of the ocean that had prevented him from reaching the shore by the underground road, as well as the fact that none of the animals in the ocean behaved differently at night, an improbable idea came to his mind.

'Could it be that the entire ocean floor rests on a gigantic Soul Stone?'

