

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 335 - The Triad

‘What was that scream?’ Enya cringed listening to that heart-rending wail.

Will glanced hesitantly at Jake, whose Berserk physique was slowly returning to normal, but chose to remain silent. As for Hakkrasha, he was still as relaxed as ever, as if this painful shriek had no influence on him.

‘It sounded like my cousin Brice.’ Jake finally scoffed with open contempt. ‘Don’t worry about him, he got what he deserved.’

Upon discovering that Jake had no intention of flying to his rescue, the wrinkles on Will’s forehead visibly smoothed out. It had been so difficult to get out of the previous hall that he didn’t feel ready to run headlong into new dangers.

Tough luck for him, staying put wasn’t necessarily safer.

Thud, thud, thud...

The nine Zhorions walked through the door behind them with a regal and even gait. The group split in two to flank them on both sides, but the eighteen aliens paid no heed to them and did not pause for a second. They entered the darkness of the new hall without showing the slightest concern, fading into the darkness shortly after.

‘No reason to overthink for nothing.’ Jake said after a while, as he heard Bawopi’s wheezing breath coming closer. ‘I’m going in regardless of whether you follow me or not.’

Enya and Will frowned, but they knew he was right. Hakkrasha just took a big stride forward into the unknown, showing by his action that he had always intended to do so.

Seconds after Jake and his group ventured into the endless hall, Bawopi walked through the door. His stature and musculature were again at their peak, while his dendrites radiated vitality with the brightness of neon lights.

A few wisps of lightning crackled from time to time along his armor and joints, giving the impression that his body was overflowing with energy. A Nosk like this was extremely dangerous, but it was also detrimental to their own health.

Ekhuno dmz ovu duj uhvmul md lhzufq1 dfz fvuft md vaQ, Bfjmna dmprt rm laer md ovu vpQfrl vu jfl hvflare. Cfiqiw, vu lraddut ovu faz lusuzfi oaQul frt nzullut val ufz om ovu ezmprt gudmzu euooare pn jaov f samiuro caiiare arouro.

‘Just you wait!’

The Nosk then stepped into the darkness and his figure disappeared, letting the rumble of thunder rattle in his wake. With Bawopi, all the participants had left the original room.

At least that’s what the alien thought. The black-haired, black-eyed human that Enya seemed to recognize entered the second hall long after Bawopi had disappeared. As soon as he approached the darkness, his body melted into it like a shadow, or rather some kind of smoke. He was now impossible to locate.

Back on Jake’s side, after covering just a few meters, he lost all his sensory bearings. Even when he decided to retrace his steps, he found only infinite darkness to welcome him. Only the luminous arrows were still present, showing him the path to follow.

He could no longer hear the breath of his comrades either, and when he whispered and then shouted to them, the distant echo of another participant's voice came to him instead. Aware that there was nothing he could do to help them, he sighed wearily and resumed his walk, this time in the right direction.

Jake wasn't afraid of the dark, but with his Perception and Apex Predator Glyph, he regretted that his night vision was still so bad. The material or paint coating on these walls was truly amazing.

After a ten minute walk without knowing if this long hall had an end, the decor finally changed.

Plop! Plop! Plop!

Feeling a drop, then another one falling on his face, Jake halted momentarily with a puzzled frown. 'What the hell is going on?'

Io jfl loaii tfzc, gpo fl vu Qmsut dmzjftz, ovu zfar arourladaut dzmQ f iaevo tzaxxiu om f omzzuroafi tmjrnmpz. Ir bplo f duj Qarpoul, f dzaevourare jart zmlu dzmQ f hmmi gzuuxu om f vpzzahfru ovfo rm rmzQfi vpQfr hmpit vfsu jaovlommt.

Well, except for Jake. The floor and the walls being perfectly smooth, even a physically super mighty Player would have been unable to move against such a wind, but for him it was child's play. With his 30 tons, the wind was just too light to dislodge him from his position.

If that was all this test had in store for him, he had nothing to fear. Silently sneering at the storm, Jake raised one hand to protect his head from the wind and rain and continued to move forward, step by step with a sardonic smile plastered on his face.

Sadly, his smile didn't last. Untiringly, the wind and rain continued to intensify until it reached such a level a few minutes later that his body began to wobble.

Watching his body slowly slide backwards against his will, Jake began to freak out for real, his confidence gone. By reflex, he mobilized what little telekinesis he could deploy without catching a splitting headache, but just a minute later, that wasn't enough anymore either and he tilted backwards.

Before he could even get up again, the wind and rain intensified once more and the water level gradually rose without him being able to do anything to prevent it. With absolute darkness reigning in this wide corridor, Jake felt like he was re-enacting his adventures in the abyss, except that at the time he knew how to go back.

'Xi help me!' Jake finally cried out in heartfelt dread when the hall was completely submerged and his body was swept away by a gigantic wave propelled at insane speed by a wind strong enough to blow a small mountain.

[...]

Radio silence. When Jake realized that he couldn't even feel the warm presence of his Oracle AI, he really flipped out. After sharing his consciousness with her, Xi was a part of him for better or worse. When she vanished, he experienced it as the amputation of a limb, only worse.

He also noticed that he no longer felt his Oracle Device nor the Oracle System. The Aether stats overload he kept as a last resort was no longer accessible either. He couldn't even access his Aether Storage.

'Jake, calm down! Think about it, there's got to be a reason for that. There's no way an incident could happen during every Ordeal.'

That's probably what Xi would have shouted to him if she had felt his distress. Yeah, no matter how wide that hall was, at the speed this tsunami was carrying him away he should have long ago returned to the door of the previous hall.

Yet, what he was feeling was real. The lack of oxygen, the pressure of the water on his chest and the liters of salt water burning his bronchial tubes... This pain couldn't be faked.

CRUNCH!

Alas, it was not his cat, it was just the sound of his leg being gobbled up by a sea monster of colossal proportions. The intense pain caused him to lapse briefly, but an even more searing pain in the back of his neck jolted him awake.

Faced with his imminent death, all his neurons were firing like never before and his instincts took over. He turned on all his glyphs, including Bloodline Ignition, but the increase in his power gave him only a brief respite.

When he didn't have any more hope, Jake also switched off the ultraviolet radiation blocking the Soul Energy of the Flintium and Naequat in his cells and then... The pain was gone.

Cough, cough! Blah!

On all fours on the floor, Jake coughed, spat and vomited everything in his stomach until the taste of bile was the only thing left in his mouth. He had never felt so weak.

[It's all right, Jake. You made it through.] Xi's reassuring voice suddenly trumpeted in his head, as if everything he had just experienced was a bad dream.

Adouz val gzufovare zuopzrut om rmzqfi frt val hmrspilamrl lomnut, Jfcu rmoahut ovfo vu jfl loaii ar ovfo jatu, tfzc hmzzatmz, gpo vu hmpit luu ovu tmmz om ovu dazlo vfii f duj quouzl guvart vaq. Dulnaou fii ovu oaqu lnuro dmiimjare ovulu fzzmjf, vu vft gazeiw ofcur f loun dmzjft.

‘What happened? A spiritual attack?’ Jake asked coldly, not daring to reactivate his ultraviolet radiation. His body was burning up very quickly, but he didn’t dare to end his Berserk mode.

[I don’t think it was a simple Player] Xi calmly elaborated. None of the participants, not even these Zhorions, have such capabilities. If I had to bet, I’d say it was an illusion fueled by Orxanium.]

Blue Stone so... Jake thought he was immune to the Soul Stones energy with its ultraviolet radiation, but he realized he had been too naive. The Soul Energy it contained may have been neutralized by strong radiation, but its effects could be channeled for other uses.

This was the case with Naequat, which regenerated the mind and increased mental acuity. The mental recovery from this effect was permanent.

The Red Soul Stone stimulated the body and mind, the Green Soul Stone harmonized and regenerated, while the Blue Soul Stone calmed the body by immersing the mind in a lucid dream from which there was no escape.

This triad of Flintium, Naequat and Orxanium, whose interactions could produce multiple results on exposed souls, were deadly in most cases. It was a complex topic that he had only just scratched the surface of after all his time in this Sanctuary Bubble.

Fortunately, his last resort had worked, but he was not out of the woods yet, far from it. A quick scan confirmed to him the existence of a malignant energy in the air. Whatever trap he had fallen into, the device was still active.

If he switched off his Berserk mode, he was sure to fall back into the same never-ending nightmare. He was aware that Bloodline Ignition was not enough to wake him up. It was the effect of this glyph, combined with the energy contained by the Flintium and Naequat minerals in his cells that had allowed him to overcome this illusion.

From what he knew about Enya and Will, they were surely already dead. Jake could hardly have been more pessimistic.

Aware that he couldn't afford to be frugal right now, on Xi's advice he immediately spent tens of thousands of Aether points to overload his Aether stats. With his Spirit Body lvl 8, his mental resilience was definitely one of his strong points. He could withstand an overload well above the average of the participants.

A moment later, all of his Aether stats more than doubled, surpassing all 600 points. The weight of the bracelet that was crushing him suddenly became insignificant, while his mental capacities exceeded their former limits. His Berserk state faded then without the illusion swallowing him up and his body stopped burning out.

Nevertheless, the migraine characteristic of the Overload hit him hard. Wincing, he deployed part of his mental power to contain all the Aether within him that threatened to scatter, but it was like lifting a heavy load. Painful and unsustainable in the long run.

It was now a race against time between his mind and the last few surprises that this Ordeal had yet to reveal.