

Oracle 543

Chapter 543 - Follow Me

"Halt!"

Jake frowned as he heard one of the Evolvers recruited by Bhuzkoc shout this order in the distance. It was a voice brimming with masculine authority and loud enough to reach them, which was no small feat considering the amount of distance they kept between their group.

A flock of birds perched on nearby trees took flight anarchically at the daunting yell, generating a cacophony of angry chirping that momentarily made the refugees suspect another Digestor attack.

Exchanging a serious look with Will, Jake also took off, kicking up a geyser of dust in his wake, and stealthily flew over the spot where the three factions had just stopped. Manipulating the ambient photons to make himself invisible, he found an observation spot about a kilometer above the ground and proceeded to scan the surrounding landscape.

The three factions were far too sluggish and spread out to hide themselves, even in this ash forest, and he easily found them, stationed vigilantly around a huge spiral cone-shaped structure.

In fact, it was this rocky protuberance that he had first spotted. From below with the rest of his group, it had been obscured by the dense tree foliage that they were using to cover their movements. Jake should have spotted such a rock structure much earlier, but they had entered a foggy area since the day before that had only just lifted. It made one wonder if this fortuitous coincidence was auspicious, or if they were playing the game of someone else who intended to drag them here.

In some aspects, this thing looked like the hull of a huge seashell, but this thing had clearly sprung up from the earth as shown by the color and the ash-gray texture of the rock covering it. It looked more like an unusual outgrowth than a mountain naturally formed by the play of local tectonic plates.

What made this spiral cone structure so off-putting was not so much its shape as its excessiveness. This rocky spire was about ten times wider than a soccer field, and its peak cut through the thick cloud cover, disappearing somewhere in the troposphere.

Jake could understand why this order was given. The alien responsible for the order was of the same orc species as Grash, but with the attributes of a ferocious creature not found on Earth.

Even bulkier and more muscular than Grash, this orc was shredded with pitch black skin and long dreadlocks and braids of the same color. His ears were pointed, his long yellowish fangs had nothing to envy to those of Mufasa while his golden irises and slit pupils sheltered a sinister and malicious glint betraying his immense experience and merciless character. To complete this fearsome portrait, this orc was covered from head to toe by a thick black armor covered with sharp spikes.

It was undoubtedly a formidable Evolver, possibly of the same level or higher than Grash. Jake hadn't noticed him before despite his frequent overflights of their camp and this had the makings of a warning siren in his already wary mind.

"Grash, do you know him?" Jake asked after telepathically transferring the Evolver's image.

"I know him. He was recruited alongside me by Bhuzkoc." The pig-like orc replied with embarrassment. "The terms of his contract are more favorable than mine. He is a mercenary who arrived a few days after the incident with the first Rank 9 Digestor. He did not participate in the elimination of the next ones, but before Shaktilar and Melkree had time to react he had already joined Bhuzkoc's camp. I don't know what Bhuzkoc offered him, but I don't think he is capable of commanding such an Evolver."

"Who do you think is stronger between you two?" Jake asked the crucial question without any consideration for his naive comrade's ego.

Grash gave a wry smile before answering with a sigh,

"He's stronger for sure. He should be a Fifth-Ordeal Player too, but he might have completed six."

Jake became thoughtful as he took in his earnest tone. 'This guy hasn't been involved in any previous attacks or I would have noticed him.'

If this alien had participated in the defense of Bhuzkoc's camp, at least twice as many of his refugees would still be alive instead of the current one hundred or so. In this regard, his relationship with the Nawai chief was probably not as good as Grash made it out to be. Judging by the current situation, it seemed more like Bhuzkoc was the one bending over backwards and compromising to keep him on his side.

So the real question to be raised was why had he decided to show up only now and not during the previous attacks where his participation would have been sorely needed?

[Because he has no choice.] Xi, who had been less than talkative lately, sneered scornfully. [There must be someone or something forcing him to show up.]

Indeed, when Jake probed the forest around the "shell," he was startled to discover the presence of many other campsites. They were remarkably well camouflaged by the cover of the ash trees' thick foliage, but such a large number of people could only be concealed for so long.

The mighty orc at Bhuzkoc's side had obviously sniffed them out before he did.

'How strange...!' Jake stroked his chin from above as he flew over the various camps one by one.

In just a few moments of flying over, he had already counted 29 different factions. Mentally calculating and combining that with what he knew about the layout of the Oracle Shelters, he began to get an idea of what was going on.

"If I'm not mistaken, the Oracle City of the Oracle Playground should be right above this spiral rocky point." Jake concluded in a whisper as he cast his gaze to the heavens.

Needless to say, he found nothing but a thick layer of dark, stormy clouds. The city was orbiting at a fantastic altitude, and even if his Perception was good enough, the Black Cube's camouflage would have made it undetectable anyway.

[Bingo.] Xi agreed with his deduction. [If I'm not mistaken, the censorship should be partially lifted by now. That rocky prominence should be the entrance to the Dungeon Digestor.]

Delighted by the news, Jake immediately pressed her for more information.

"It's about time! Hey Xi, can you tell me a little more about it now?"

His Oracle Ai wasn't comfortable with his outpouring of mawkishness, but it wasn't as if she didn't feel guilty about being unable to be helpful. Focusing hard, she tried to formulate a response, but all that came out of her mouth was a string of unintelligible words.

[I feel like the censorship is still on...] She sighed and fell back into an embarrassed silence.

Jake was speechless. Almost every function of the Oracle System was malfunctioning in Digestors territory, including the various Cubes that would have allowed them to break out of here, but the censorship that was more of a hindrance than a helpful feature was still up and running. It made you wonder if the Oracle wasn't just messing with them?

'I swear that if I ever meet the asshole who programmed this system that I'll make him wear a bracelet wherein I'll censor all his sentences and replace them with "I'm the biggest son of a bitch in the Mirror Universe and I like it.'

[Don't say that!] Xi exclaimed in utter horror.

If she still had her old body, her forehead would have been covered with beads of sweat by now. If the oracle got wind of their blasphemous thoughts, she knew better than to expect them to live.

"Hmmp, I'm not afraid." Jake grumbled to himself with a smug face, but after that "brave" statement, he ceased all blasphemous thoughts. Obviously, his daring had its limits...

As Jake hovered over the other camps, he picked up several unfathomable Aether signatures. Seen from the perspective of his Myrtharian Eyes, some of them were as bright as stars on a moonless night. Some of these auras even exceeded the black orc's in brightness.

More than once, he narrowly missed being spotted despite his invisibility and was forced to retreat or increase his flight altitude to escape the senses of these terrifying powerhouses.

As Jake wondered how the situation would evolve, the shrill cackling that had punctuated their entire journey for several days suddenly echoed in a deafening way. The number of cackles was so great that the earth began to tremble and he almost fainted out of sheer fright when he saw the horde fast approaching on the horizon.

Millions of Digestors as far as the eye could see. Not Ranks 1, 2, or 3, but horrific monstrosities ranging in size from several dozen meters to nearly a kilometer long. The Aetheric signatures were so extraordinary that they could only belong to Rank 5 to 10 Digestors, and as for those belonging to Rank 9 and 10 Digestors, he had already counted at least 1,000 of them at the very least.

"Holy shit!"

Covered in a cold sweat, Jake gave up any thought of remaining stealthy and released a deafening supersonic wave as his body shot off like a shooting star at lightning speed to where his own camp was located.

Likewise, the other leaders also perceived the threat and immediately gave a series of orders to prepare for an intense battle. None of them paid any attention to him.

As soon as Jake landed with his group, he felt the gazes filled with confidence and pride of his subordinates. Seeing their faith and fearlessness, he couldn't find it in himself to tell them the truth.

Gritting his teeth, he weighed the pros and cons and barked,

"Follow me."