

Oracle 731

Chapter 731 Thanks Sherlock

With the spells cast by Jake, the duo made their way through the checkpoints of each plateau without slowing down. They didn't need to be discreet, as they proudly paraded up the never-ending staircase and reached the top without a hitch.

When they had joined the Mutant Office three months earlier, they were not allowed to proceed to visit the headquarters at the peak of Laudarkvik. Three months later, Jake could travel to the summit without disruption as if he were in his own backyard.

"This... How do you do that?" Carmin whispered helplessly, her heart racing. Every time a guard looked in her direction, she would momentarily freeze up from her fear of being found out.

"Relax. They can't see us, they can't hear us, and they can't smell us." Jake replied coolly.

His vague answer did not reassure Carmin in the least.

"But then, why can I see you? And even if they can't see or hear us, there's still our Aetheric and spiritual signature..." She countered with concern.

No sooner had she finished expressing her doubts than Jake who was walking beside her vanished before her eyes. It wasn't just her eyesight that was playing tricks on her. He had literally disappeared as if he no longer existed.

Whether it was his aura, his Aether, or even the air flow that accompanied his every step, nothing betrayed his presence. The level of control required to accomplish this was just terrifying and she found it hard to believe that a Fourth Ordeal Player like her could do it. And yet, that's exactly what had just happened!

Then Jake reappeared in front of her, narrowly missing giving her a heart attack. Gasping loudly while pressing her hand against her bouncing chest, she angrily mouthed,

"Don't... ever... do that again! Goodness, I thought I was going to die! It's not okay to make jokes like that."

Jake let her grumble to herself the rest of the way, but at least she was no longer worried about making too much noise. In truth, these Stealth spells weren't foolproof.

While they were truly undetectable by the enemy's five senses and even extrasensory perception, they were still basic Aether Spells that he had cooked up with his meager experience. On the surface they

seemed impossible to counter, but in practice they were only powered by his Aether Core.

At just over 5,000 yield points, it may have seemed powerful, but for casting spells it was actually quite paltry. It took a considerable amount of Aether to produce a little energy and the 5000 points of the accretion disc was obviously not enough.

Under normal circumstances, when Jake used his Aether Core he would speed up its rotation to passively suck in the surrounding Aether. This was the only way he could spam Aether Spells that had the energy potential of a big grenade. For more powerful spells, Jake had to tap into his own stamina to sustain their execution.

Since the goal was to erase their presence, he obviously couldn't rely on his Aether Core's ability to suck up energy for his spells, or the turbulence generated would instantly expose them. The Aether in his Aether Core was insufficient, so the fuel came almost exclusively from his stamina.

Jake was practically tireless, it was true, but that was only relative to normal efforts. In this case, he might have climbed the stairs undetected, but a keen observer would have easily noticed the many beads of sweat on his forehead. With most of his stamina going into supporting those Stealth Spells, even the slightest bit of intense combat would cause him to run out of breath in no time.

'Can't wait for my Reiga Core to reach a functional level.' He sighed inwardly, ignoring his muscle fatigue.

The glycogen in his muscles was depleting rapidly, but each of his cells was like a small nuclear battery, quickly renewing the lost energy. In addition to this, he had also eaten a plutonium ingot for continuous energy at breakfast as usual. If he had still been human, these radioactive materials would have been the equivalent of whole grain cereals.

Besides the difficulty of maintaining the spell, the real weakness of these Stealth Spells was their low energy level. If the enemy, whether native or Player, could cast a detection or anti-magic counterspell superior to his, their presence would be immediately detected. If one of these enemies also possessed outstanding mental power and specifically scanned the area they were in, they would also be exposed.

Finally, there were many other methods of detection that were much more circuitous. For example, instinct, clairvoyance, and divination. All it took was one player with a higher Oracle Rank than his and all his efforts would be easily nullified.

Fortunately for them, luck seemed to smile on them. Despite the growing pressure as they got closer to the top, not once were they disturbed.

After passing the last checkpoint without any trouble, the duo finally reached the top of Laudarkvik. This one was narrower than the other plateaus, and apart from the headquarters of each faction and the strongholds of the most influential clans, there was nothing but a vast, impeccably mowed lawn.

For the place that was supposed to be the decision-making and military center of Laudarkvik, both Jake

and Carmin were surprised to see no one. This mountain top was... incredibly empty.

"Where is everyone?" The young woman murmured suspiciously.

Jeanie, who was napping in her pocket until now, chose this moment to wake up. Her sleepy little face swung her head to the right and then to the left, before commenting limply, ~~PAQ dfa N222 et~~

"There's not much of a crowd..."

"Thanks Sherlocks." Jake patted the tiny fairy's head, pushing her back into the bottom of his mantle pocket.

"Who is Sherlock?" Her muffled, sulky voice echoed through his mantle, but he ignored it to focus on the dilemma before him.

After a few seconds of thought, he made a guess,

"Having never been here before, I don't know if this situation is normal or not. Each stronghold is protected by its own compound and to avoid tensions between Factions in this climate of war it may have been decided to prohibit inter-faction travel."

"That would make sense anyway." Carmin agreed with his reasoning but did not relax her guard. "But that means the defenses will be stricter."

"I never thought we could safely extract Wyatt without a fight anyway." Jake snarled, his casual disposition changing dramatically. In the blink of an eye, he went from relaxed to combat-ready, his stern face becoming that of a dangerous killing machine.

As Jeanie and Carmin witnessed the change in his demeanor, they stopped chattering and also conditioned themselves for the coming battle.

"Which is the stronghold of the Dracul clan?" Jake asked dispassionately as he quickly inspected each Vampire stronghold with a quick glance. In addition to the HQ, there were three strongholds corresponding to the three clans holding seats on the Council. Cazimir Nosferati had been killed, so in theory there were only two left, unless he had been replaced.

Pointing to a medieval castle all in dark stone with tall, pointed towers, Carmin confidently said,

"It should be this one. At least that's where Wyatt is being held prisoner."

Indeed, Wyatt had no reason to hide his location from his childhood friend and other longtime subordinates. By giving them the ability to locate him at will, he could greatly increase his chances of escape.

Jake hadn't forgotten this feature of the Oracle Device, but his Shadow Guide had remained motionless when he had tried to plan a rescue. This could only mean one of two things: Either a Player with a higher Oracle Rank than him was overseeing the enemy operation, or Wyatt did not want to be found by him.

While he didn't completely refute the first assumption, the second was still very likely. After all, they were enemies not so long ago, and it was hard to trust a rival from another faction like that. If it weren't for Carmin, Jake wouldn't have cared about Wyatt's fate.

'I guess I'm not as petty and selfish as people think.' Jake gave a sour laugh.

"Follow me. From now on, we can get into a fight anytime." Jake stated as he drew his sword.

Carmin took him seriously and also grabbed her Blood Whip. Jeanie also equipped her tiny wand that was no longer than a toothpick.

, c.o.m Under the cover of her Stealth Spells, the duo climbed the wall without attracting the attention of the guards. Before jumping to the other side, they were able to confirm their previous hypothesis.

Vampires as far as the eye could see and almost all of them aristocrats. Vampire Nobles and offspring of the Vampire Progenitor were legion here and represented the core power of the Dracul clan.

Following Carmin's directions, the group weaved in and out of the guards, until Jake came to an abrupt stop. The young woman bumped her head against his back, but she refrained from making any noise. She noticed at once that instead of speaking, Jake had simply waved his hand.

It spoke volumes about the dangerousness of the situation.

Articulating exaggeratedly to let her read his lips, Jake silently explained,

"From that point on, there's an anti-magic barrier with other functions that I don't understand. We have two options. Decipher it and get through it without setting off the alarm, or rush as fast as we can to Wyatt and free him."

Chapter 732 Modern Security System

"Why don't you use telepathy to communicate?" Carmin blurted out.

"To piss you off." Jake retorted silently, rolling his eyes. "More seriously, it can break my Stealth Spell. Sound and light I can pretty much handle, but covering up telepathic signs I'm less confident. Even if the probability of being spotted is still very low I'd rather not take the risk."

"Oh.." Carmin nodded with a skeptical face. " Back to your previous dilemma, the first option seems obvious to me, no? Why would we take reckless risks if we can sneak in unnoticed?"

Jake stared at her with big round eyes as if he was worried about her sanity, then let out an exasperated sigh,

"Sigh... Whatever. Let's go for the deciphering then."

He could have taken the time to clearly explain the limitations of his magic to her, to make her understand that they were far from undetectable, or that an enemy Player with a high Oracle Rank could flush them out effortlessly, but that would only worry her unnecessarily in addition to wasting their time.

Whether it was good news or bad news, he didn't know yet, but the deciphering went smoothly. It took Jake three long hours to get anywhere and two more to crack the magic barrier.

The main obstacles were twofold: the Runes' microscopic size and the fact that it was a Mana Spell. Fortunately, the Rune Aetherist Soul Class also had some hidden perks as he soon realized.

The passive skills "Aether Affinity" and "Aether Compression/Expansion" had misled him into thinking they were limited to Aether. The reality was that going all the way back to the quintessence, everything, absolutely everything was made of Aether.

While this did not make him a Mana expert, the energetic nature of Mana was obviously close enough to Aether for his Soul Class skills to work on it. Once he realized this, the next step was much easier.

With the help of his Aether Expansion skill, Jake artificially enlarged the microscopic Mana Runes that created the barrier. It was grueling and time-consuming, but fortunately much easier to accomplish in this direction than in the other. When he felt it would take too long, he compromised by creating a Zoom Spell.

With this two-way method, he was finally able to memorize and decipher the entire Mana Symbol. After that, all he had to do was deduce the counter-spell, not to make the barrier disappear, but to create a gap through which they could slip through without setting off the alarm.

The more he studied the barrier, the more he was sweating profusely, realizing that they'd had a close call. If they had really gone in headlong, all the castle's defensive measures would have been triggered at once.

They were not to be taken lightly. From what little he had seen, their Body Stats would have been decreased at least tenfold, their Extrasensory Perception would have been completely nullified, rendering them unable to sense Mana or Aether, while a poisonous gas that only the most prominent Vampires of the Dracul clan had the antidote for would have smoked them out in a split second.

up and down several spiral staircases, the duo finally arrived at the entrance to the underground dungeons. In a technologically backward medieval world, what was a door? A flick of his telekinesis and he could crack any lock.

But this was no ordinary door.

"Fuck! Is this a joke?!" Jake cursed as he discovered a second armored door made of pure Adamantium just behind the first.

In addition to being impossible to destroy in a short time, the Mana Symbols enchanting this one had been placed on the other side. To access it, Jake would need to extend his mental sense through the magic metal, but he soon discovered that the material was completely impervious to his mental power.

"Damn it!" Jake's face turned ugly as he found himself back to the wall because of a crude pile of scrap metal.

"How do we handle it now?" Carmin's face broke down along with him. If they couldn't open this door, they couldn't save Wyatt.

"Wait a minute..." Jake cut her off rudely. He'd just noticed something.

This door had no handle, no lock. It couldn't be pushed or pulled, lifted or lowered, and there was no switch in the corner to retract the door. Short of destroying the rock base around it, which would make a considerable racket, they had no way to get around this door.

The only notable thing about this door was the strange peephole at face level. Trying to look through it, they couldn't see anything, but the door did seem to click into place when his eye approached it. Before it could fully activate, he pulled his head back.

An optical security scanner! In a medieval world! He had completely underestimated the ingenuity of these Vampires. Unless it wasn't them who had built this door?

"Carmin, I'm afraid our hassle-free adventure ends here." Jake commented gravely. "Prepare for battle."

"I've always been ready." She laughed, giving him her most sparkling smile. At that moment, she was the most beautiful woman in Quanoth.

Jake gasped at such charm and gorgeousness, but remembering that she used Charm Spells as easily as she breathed, he immediately regained his composure, even becoming a little bitter. With such tricky women around him, it was hard to sort out his feelings...

'Lucia where are you?' He lampooned as he visualized the candid and sincere smile of the Myrmidian princess. Of all the women orbiting around him, she was the only one who didn't seem to be trying to get something out of their relationship.

"For now we hide and wait." Jake replied to the Vampire's silent question as she wondered about his sudden change in behavior.

If Carmin had known the outrageous opinion he had of her, she would have become very angry. Because, she hadn't used any Charm spell at all, not even the passive attraction from her Charm stat. That was how distrustful he was of her. Even when she wasn't doing anything, he thought she was up to something.

Following Jake, the duo hid nearby in an adjacent hallway, waiting patiently for someone to enter or exit that door. They had prepared themselves mentally to wait for many hours, maybe even days in these conditions, but luck smiled on them once again.

Not even five minutes later, the Adamantium door creaked, and as if by magic it folded in on itself like a sheet of paper to let through a grizzled, heavily overweight Vampire whose white pourpoint and leather apron donned over it were stained with blood.

"That's our man!" Jake blurted out malevolently.

With perfect timing, they bolted from their hiding place and went on the attack, but Jake was much faster. Carmin had only taken one step forward, and he had already knocked the poor Vampire out.

"Tsk..." The young woman pouted with a vexed look at his lack of chivalry. He could at least have spared her ego by running a little slower.

Indifferent to her worries, Jake grabbed the unconscious Vampire by the neck and pressed his skull against the peephole of the door which had just reappeared. With his free hand, he opened one of his eyes and a welcome beep informed him that the optical scan had authenticated his identity.

The door folded back on itself again and they charged inside.

Chapter 733 The Dracul Dungeon

As soon as the Adamantium door closed completely, the cramped staircase they were walking down was plunged into darkness. Both Jake and Carmin switched to night vision and four luminous globes, including a pair of glittering galaxies and another of crimson stars, pierced the night.

With their hypersensitive eyes, the staircase before them looked as bright as day. Even without any secondary source of light, Jake could easily emit a brief light pulse, whose photons would be partially reflected by the surfaces illuminated by it.

It was similar to the echolocation method used by bats to find their way around. Of course, he could light up these dungeons for good, but turning the light back on suddenly would not help their so far furtive approach.

However, the Vampires were all nyctalopes and Jake had no intention of switching off his Stealth Spell

until their cover was completely blown. Without being overly cautious, the duo continued to move forward at a slow, measured pace, taking the time to clearly identify their surroundings as they went.

Once they reached the bottom of the long staircase, they emerged into a dank underground complex resembling a catacomb. The place smelled musty while the walls, floor and ceiling were made exclusively of stone. The hall at the foot of the stairs was not very spacious. About four meters wide and six meters long.

At the end of the hall, two pale-skinned Vampires were playing dice around a shabby table. Behind them, an adamantium gate with bars as thick as a log blocked their way. Compared to the previous door, there was a prominent padlock system, and its keyhole matched one of the large, rustic keys hanging from one of the two Vampires' key sets.

"Who goes there?!"

These guards might have been playing dice while on duty, but they hadn't been placed there by accident. Their superior had just left the dungeon, but they had clearly heard the adamantium door at the top of the stairs open and close a second time.

By estimating the average walking speed since the door was activated they had instantly determined how long it would take this new visitor to reach them. Seeing no one, their vigilance was immediately aroused.

Jake's expression changed abruptly as he discovered how good these guards were. In a heartbeat the two Vampires got up from their chairs and threw them in front of the stairwell exit. The one closest to them then grabbed the large rectangular table and threw it at them with the same violence.

With seamless cooperation, the second Vampire slashed his right wrist with one of his claws and hundreds of strands of blood escaped, quickly forming a bloody net as tangible and elastic as a real fishing net.

Breaking this net was no problem for Jake and Carmin, but it put an end to their stealthy approach. To buy some time, though, Jake teleported to their backs with Carmine as the bloody net, table and two chairs smashed into the opposite wall and staircase.

With one swipe of the edge of their hand, Jake and Carmine knocked out their respective targets. Knocking out a Noble Vampire was obviously not like knocking out an ordinary human. A simple brain concussion would only stun them for a few tenths of a second at most.

Stunning a Vampire with one blow actually meant breaking their neck, and sealing off their carotid arteries or more generally cutting off blood flow to the brain. If that wasn't enough, it meant blowing out their skulls and a fair chunk of their brains. Fortunately in this case their enemies were not so tough. They fell with the first blow.

When Jake struck, he would vibrate his arm at a certain frequency, ensuring that the overlapping impact would generate enough of a shockwave in the victim's body to severely damage nearby organs. After that, even if the victim managed to wake up, he would be in such a bad shape that he would be unable to move or even communicate.

"What do we do with these three?" Carmin whispered contritely.

The third one was obviously the first Vampire Jake had neutralized to open the Adamantium door. Jake was somewhat hesitant. Perhaps the key ring from these guards would suffice, but how could he be sure there wouldn't be another optical security scanner or some other unknown protective measure after that gate?

"We're taking them with us. All three of them..." Not making a decision was also making a decision. Unable to make up his mind, he stopped thinking and threw the three Vampires into his Space Storage.

This place wasn't meant for the living, but these Vampires could survive here without any harm. It was both a blessing and a curse, their strength and their weakness. To kill a Vampire, a stake in the heart or decapitation was not necessarily fatal as in the myths. They were even less afraid of garlic and holy water.

Even drained of their blood, they could still survive in that hypersleep state that the Vampires of Quanoth rightly called Eternal Rest. Throughout their history, many had exploited their supposed immortality to inflict abuses worse than death on them.

Why was Jake remembering all this? Because it turned out that behind the gate guarded by these two Vampires was a veritable gallery of horrors.

An endless corridor as wide as the hall at the base of the stairs stretched into the darkness with numerous intersections. Every five or six meters there was a moldy wooden door with a rudimentary wooden plaque nailed to it. On it could be read the name of the prisoner locked up there and in what way.

The vast majority of these prisoners were Vampires who had once betrayed, conspired or simply held different opinions from the Dracul clan. Because Jake and Carmin were unfamiliar with the history of Quanoth, they wisely chose to stay out of it, but that didn't stop them from reading the contents of those wooden plaques.

[Prisoner #1: Dante Dracul: Betrayed his clan in the year 303 by leaking critical information to the enemy that resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Dracul Vampires.

Sentence: Eternal drowning]

An example of a sentence that was known to punish a Vampire who committed unforgivable crimes was to drain him or her of their blood to deprive them of their strength, lock them in an almost indestructible metal coffin that would then be filled with water before being sealed shut permanently. A

perpetual drowning would ensue. The Vampire would suffocate constantly, but his soul would outlive his body, allowing it to regularly come back to life to relive the same ordeal.

Behind this door, there was an old Vampire drowning every two three minutes for almost 700 years. If he hadn't already gone insane, his fortitude and enmity towards his clan would have reached an unimaginable level by now. Releasing him was a very bad idea, although there was a chance that he would become their ally.

[Prisoner #2: Bastien Rees: The Vampire Progenitor of the Rees clan who in the year 306 instigated a revolt against the Dracul clan that resulted in the deaths of several heirs to the throne.

Sentence: Chopped into a thousand pieces and eternal drowning].

Jake and Carmin shuddered as they pictured the horror that lay behind that door. According to the feedback from his Myrtharian Eyes, the prisoner was still alive.

The even more hardcore version of eternal drowning used against the first prisoner and reserved for the most dangerous criminals consisted of doing exactly the same thing, but cutting their bodies into pieces beforehand and locking them in different jars or crypts. Since they could endure the deprivation of oxygen and blood, as long as their brains were whole their heads would survive.

The rest of their visit to the dungeons continued to open their horizons, the degree of horror only getting worse. One had to admit that these Vampires knew how to punish their enemies. Anyone in their right mind who ended up in one of these cells would decisively choose suicide rather than continue this life of suffering with no future.

As she read all these plaques, Carmin became increasingly livid and silent. Jake remained stoic, but the frown on his face only deepened as they explored. If Wyatt was trapped here, they had to assume the worst.

Surprisingly, they didn't run into anyone on their way. It seemed that even the jailers didn't have the stomach to stay here much longer. It was a good thing for them and they could explore the dungeons at their leisure.

After checking thousands of cells, which shocked Jake and Carmin to the core about the number of enemies the Dracul clan had accumulated and imprisoned in its history, they stopped at another dingy door. On this one, it read,

[Prisoner #4325: Wyatt Griffiths: A Guilty who infiltrated the Dracul clan in the year 1000.

Sentence: Chopped into a hundred pieces and drowned forever.]

"Nooooo!" Carmin couldn't hold back this time and she burst into tears. Mad with rage, she smashed the door with her fist and rushed inside.

"Wait!" Jake tried to hold her back but it was too late.

Running after her, he came upon a damp and dusty room, covered with cobwebs, in which was stored exactly one hundred jars of different sizes. It didn't take a genius to figure out who was inside.

But that wasn't why Jake had screamed. As soon as Carmin stepped inside the room, hundreds of metal spikes shot up from the floor emitting a strange sunlight, piercing her through and through. Incredulous and unable to understand why she hadn't anticipated the trap, he could only run after her, hoping to save her in time.

Chapter 734 Pathetic

'Crap!' Jake grimaced with a regretful expression as he arrived too late in front of a hole-ridden young woman. The powerful radiation emitted from those spikes was charring the surrounding tissue at a frightening rate.

How could Carmin have been so careless that she forgot the most elementary principles of precaution? He could only blame himself for overestimating her maturity.

Then he froze, even carefully drawing his saber as he backpedaled.

Had Jake really overestimated her? That wasn't the point. It didn't matter if he overestimated her or not, because he wasn't relying on his judgment alone to make his plans.

His Shadow Guide hadn't moved all along. That Wyatt didn't want to be found was one thing he could accept, but that his Shadow Guide remained unmoved in the face of a Carmine in mortal danger? Even if he were a hundred times dumber he would have realized something was wrong.

"Who are you?" Jake deactivated the Stealth Spells cast upon them and in the process immediately followed up by drawing a plasma rune with his fingers that formed in the air the injunction "Reveal your true nature."

The plasma words shot through space at near teleportation speed, instantly branding Carmin's left breast, the only part of her body still relatively intact. As soon as the Words of Power imprinted themselves on her milky-white skin, Jake felt an unpleasant tug on his mind, a sign that his mental strength was being drained rapidly.

At that moment, the young woman's battered appearance underwent a drastic change. From a gorgeous beauty with long silky hair and a sexy body, her curves flattened, then her waist narrowed to take the form of a slimy mass that looked like human flesh dissolved in acid. Then the mass reformed,

taking on the guise of an entirely different being. Wyatt, then Aisling, followed by Elduin and Bhammod.

"Wyatt?" Jake frowned, but after scanning the jars with his Oracle Device he relaxed, "No, you're an imposter."

When he confirmed that the monster in front of him was neither Carmin nor Wyatt, Jake's attitude changed dramatically. His previously tolerant and accommodating demeanor instantly turned icy and hostile, any sense of mercy nipped in the bud.

"Shifter, I don't care who you are or who you work for." Jake threatened, snarling ominously with an oppressive killing intent. He had rarely been this angry. "Tell me what happened to Carmin and the others and I promise to leave your corpse whole. Otherwise, I promise you that the fate inflicted on the prisoners of these catacombs will seem quite kind in comparison to the fate I have in store for you.

"Ghehehehe!"

In response to his attempt at intimidation, the monster burst out laughing.

"For a Player, you sure are arrogant." A nasal, discordant voice like an out-of-tune guitar echoed through the cell, Jake's facial muscles twitching uncontrollably as he heard the horrible sound. "All those foolish, naive Players... I had a blast torturing and manipulating them. Bringing them to their doom without them even realizing they were being led around by the nose, isn't that the most intoxicating of joys?"

Jake grew grim as he listened to the shapeshifting Player gleefully brag about his exploits. Jake may have made a mistake in following Carmin here, though it wasn't really his fault, but in his opinion this Player had also made an unforgivable mistake in trying to trap him here.

Noticing the growing hostility in Jake's eyes, the shifter abruptly stopped telling how he had loved cutting Carmin and his other comrades to pieces, reveling in their screams of agony. A more solemn and grave expression appeared on his blurred face.

This face was definitely not the face of someone resigned to die.

"Hmmp, your arrogance is even worse than I imagined." The shapeshifter sneered as he took on Wyatt's appearance and wrapped himself in a Blood Energy shield. "I am a Player, not a native. My Oracle Rank is higher than yours. To trap you like this, I obviously took the necessary precautions. Guards!"

In the blink of an eye, dozens of life-signatures popped up around him, popping up from inside the nearby cells, smashing the doors holding them captive with a kick. At a glance, Jake counted 41 enemies, half of them hooded Players. At the far end, he recognized a certain android Lich he thought he had killed.

"So it was you." Jake commented apathetically. "He had already considered the possibility from the

moment he discovered the lich was a droid.

Vhoskaud remained silent as he sensed his disdain. Communicating with a cornered prey was not worth it. Conversely, one of the native Vampires with an emaciated face and oily black hair falling to his shoulders took the opportunity to introduce himself.

"I am Remus Dracul, current leader of the Dracul clan and Aisling's uncle." He stated quietly, glaring at him with deep condescension. "You certainly have a lot of questions, but unfortunately I don't intend to answer them. Your only mistake is that you chose the wrong side."

Waving his hand as if swatting away a fly, he ordered in an authoritative tone,

"Kill him."

"Alive! I want him alive!" Vhoskaud suddenly shrieked in his robotic voice.

The middle-aged Vampire's face turned ugly, but he immediately pulled himself together, showing his abundant experience and self-control.

"Do as Vhoskaud says... Lich, you will owe me a favor." Remus stated coldly.

"Sure... What about another Schwazen specimen?"

A delighted smile stretched Remus' face.

"Deal."

Seeing them negotiate as if he didn't exist the rage rumbling in Jake's heart exploded with a bang.

"It seems you're treating me like I'm already in your hands." He scoffed in a chilling voice, the temperature in the dungeon suddenly dropping several degrees. "Let me prove to you how wrong you are!"

"Fool!" Vhoskaud sneered, but his body went rigid as if he had just lost a bolt upon witnessing the scene that unfolded next.

A Dracul elder was the first to arrive on Jake. His hand, wide open, fingers outstretched and slightly splayed, claws forward, ruthlessly swept toward his throat, almost becoming a blur due to its sheer speed. Simultaneously, two other Noble Vampires almost as old snared him from behind, one on each side, their fangs digging into either side of his neck.

"Pathetic." Jake uttered only a word filled with contempt, his voice devoid of fear.

What followed proved him right. The claws of the first one broke against the Silver Stone Skin covering his heart, the fangs of the other two held on but failed to pierce his flesh. Impassive, Jake grabbed the

first one's wrist, locking him in place, then his galactic eyes emitted an intense light, causing an internal cataclysm of unprecedented proportions.

Jake's attractive body, which was currently only a modest 1m90, suddenly began to swell, his height quickly exceeding four meters, then five meters before stabilizing at just under 5m20. A network of glowing veins, brighter and more fiery than ever, ran through his skin as his hair and eyes turned into a silvery-gold mass covered in a blazing halo of heat.

The Vampire Jake had grabbed by the wrist hung limply in front of his face, his crushed arm looking like a badly wrung out wet rag. The two Vampires trying to bite his neck let out a shrill howl and their jaws exploded, irreversibly shattered by the shockwave as Jake cracked his neck.

Yawning with his free hand, Jake tossed the Vampire whose arm he had grabbed like a dirty sock, while with a double headbutt he knocked out the other two Vampires hanging around his neck.

The three Dracul elders were thrown like cannonballs in opposite directions, their condition unknown.

Before the other Vampires could react, a burst of ultraviolet light flashed from his body, instantly charring all the Vampires present. Those with any semblance of instinct managed to duck into one of the nearby cells just in time to avoid the deadly sunburn.

As the Vampires panicked, Jake quickly teleported behind the Metamorph Player impersonating Wyatt, then casually vaporized him by shoving his Aether Sun Core into his face.

"What-How is this possible?" The other Vampires were completely in shock.

Even Remus, who had been wearing a relaxed expression until then, turned livid at this absurd display of power. Suddenly, his disbelief was replaced by irrepressible anger. Turning to the Lich beside him, he shouted hatefully,

"Vhoskaud... What the fuck is going on here? Depending on your answer, you will not leave this dungeon alive."

The Lich android harrumphed weakly, but inwardly he was totally stunned. How had this Player become so powerful in such a short time? He had lost to him, sure, but he was confident that he had perfectly figured out his limits. To make such an error in judgment... For him it was a first.

"It doesn't change our plan. On the contrary, the stronger he is, the more he deserves to become one of my guinea pigs. I want him alive, whatever it takes."

Chapter 735 New Slave

As if to prove him wrong, Jake abandoned the almost vaporized shapeshifter at the same time, with only a few grams of biomass left, to teleport directly back to Vhoskaud.

With the same flippancy as with the Shapeshifter, he smashed his Aether Sun Core right onto the top of

his skull, using the artificial sun as a flail.

The Lich instantly melted under the effect of the infernal temperature.

At that moment, the few survivors still present drew a cold breath. The Vampires with third degree burns no longer dared to leave the crypts and chests of the nearby cells where they had been hiding. Remus Dracul was also shaken, unable to fathom that there could be such a thing as a Guilty being their arch-nemesis.

"What the bloody hell are you?" The old Vampire Ancestor asked with his chin quivering and a utterly bloodless face.

"His friend." Jake shrugged with indifference as he pointed to the hundred jars containing Wyatt's severed organs and limbs.

Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed a small mass of gooey blood the size of a snot trail crawling hastily across the floor in a vain attempt to get away. The Shapeshifter, or rather what was left of it, thought it was discreet, but to Jake its efforts at stealth were as laughable as an elephant trying to hide behind a flowerpot.

"Stay here." Jake snorted as he aimed his index finger at him without looking. "Forever."

What was left of the Player Shapeshifter was immediately obliterated by a plasma bullet. To avoid any unpleasant surprises, he added a fireball and a telekinetic cage on top of his victim to prevent any miracles.

Regrettably, when he was about to get satisfaction, the Player's presence vanished and he knew that it had managed to escape.

"Oracle Teleportation, huh?" Jake locked his eyebrows. "What a shame..."

The Players in this Ordeal were definitely all well prepared. Unless one planned a perfect trap in advance anticipating their every move, eliminating them altogether was virtually impossible. Still, given the biomass it had just lost, it would not be easy for it to recover for quite some time.

Jake couldn't be sure, though. There were so many bloodlines, Soul Classes, abilities and mysterious items that he couldn't claim with certainty that his enemy wouldn't find a way to recover in record time.

With the Shapeshifter Player and Vhoskaud out of the way, Jake could now focus on the main culprit of Wyatt's demise.

"Where's Carmin?" Jake asked coldly as he walked toward him with a lumbering step that sent tremors through the catacombs.

Remus Dracul flinched as his killing intent coursed through him, but due to the pain caused by the ultraviolet radiation he was barely able to maintain his haughty and dignified facade. He spilled the beans after a few seconds.

So much for a thousand-year-old Vampire.

"Carmine... I don't know where she is." The Vampire admitted honestly as he groveled at his feet, his back still sizzling and blackening from the sunbathing.

Jake's face hardened as he heard this mushy response. It wasn't what he wanted to hear. With a thought he doubled the intensity of the ultraviolet rays.

"Aaaarrrghh! Please, stop! I'm telling the truth, I swear!"

Jake gazed with a cold and disdainful look at the emaciated carcass of the old Vampire writhing and screaming on the ground. From his excruciating screams, one could tell he was in agony, but this high-level acting could not fool his senses.

The Vampire's heart was beating unnaturally slow, the screams were believable but insincere. There was something fake about the way Remus contracted his vocal cords and convulsed on the floor.

Probing him with his Myrtharian Eyes, Jake didn't notice anything strange, but his instincts subconsciously told him what was wrong. It was the same as with Carmin.

"You're a Shapshifter too. But you're not a Guilty." Jake stated with mild amazement. " Since when?"

Remus, who was feigning his own agony, took a few seconds too long to process the implications of his words. When he realized that his identity had been exposed, his eyes popped out of his head, but literally this time.

Crack!

Jake had just stomped on his skull with all his might. The Vampire's skull burst like an overripe fruit, his blood and brains spraying the walls, floor and ceiling of the dungeon corridor. The most impactful part of this gory scene was that Jake's boot and armor stood unblemished, blood trickling down their surface but not staining them.

Jake wasn't trying to kill him. Instead, confirming his suspicions, the Vampire's headless body decomposed, then rearranged itself to form a strange solid gold treasure chest this time, about five feet long, three feet wide and two feet high.

"A Mimic." Jake commented without being surprised this time.

Mimics were a shapeshifting monster well known to RPG players. To hunt their prey, namely dungeon

explorers, they took on the appearance of what the latter coveted most: a treasure chest.

The moment an adventurer opened the chest thinking he would get rich, the anticipation of the reward would make him let his guard down. This was the moment the Mimic would choose to strike, snapping shut on its prey, the inside of the chest being lined with nothing but mucous membranes, a highly efficient digestive system and thousands of sharp teeth.

Mimics were born small and relatively harmless, but as they accumulated biomass and intelligence their range of transformations expanded. At a certain point, keeping the appearance of a treasure chest became absurd and counterproductive and they would leave the vaults, ruins and other treasure rooms they were holed up in to join civilization.

Most of them would never again take on the appearance of the chest they were born with, but it would always remain the preferred form when they wanted to rest or needed solace. This chest was for them like the maternal womb for a mammal.

[Jen, Mimic lvl 79]

In his original shape, the Mimic was much weaker than the Remus he impersonated. His level was too low to be one of the two Shapeshifters sitting on the council, so he could deduce two bad news.

The original Remus was probably dead. And, probably for a lot longer than one would think.

"Jen, tell me everything you know or die." Jake laid down his ultimatum with a blood-curdling chillingness. "This is your last chance."

Hearing his own name, the Mimic lost his last hope. His cover was blown. Amusingly, this shifter was not very loyal to his faction. In his Mimic form, he was no longer influenced by Remus's personality and his simple, primitive nature came out in all its glory.

Crouching in front of the Mimic, Jake listened intently to his confession, his brain registering each revelation with frightening analytical performance. His face grew more and more taciturn as the story progressed, but there was also a renewed sense of hope. When the Mimic stopped talking, Jake stood up.

The creature began to quiver under the inquisitive gaze of the scary man staring back at him. If Jake willed it, he could take its life with a single thought. The Mimic was no genius, but he was clear-headed enough to know that he had no chance of escape. The Shapeshifter Guilty, who was far more talented than he was, hadn't managed to escape either.

"So... Are you going to kill me?" Jen stuttered in terror a few minutes later. He couldn't stand the uncertainty of life and death anymore. Whether he died or lived, he wanted closure.

Jake was silent for a moment, then said with a cruel smile,

"It's your lucky day."

Over the next few minutes, Jake transferred 500 grams of liquid alloy from his personal collection to him, just as he had done for Jeanie. With Xi's help, he repeated the procedure, helping him set up his Oracle Device and receive his Oracle AI.

Unlike Jeanie, however, the gift did not end there. Immediately after his Player status was recognized by the Oracle, Jake forced him to sign a Slave Contract. As he read the terms, the Mimic did not show the expected disappointment. On the contrary, he was even relieved. With such strict clauses, his new master would have no reason to suppress him.

"Jen greets the Master." The Mimic declaimed heartily, the lid of his chest half lowering as if to simulate a bow.

"Take on the appearance of Remus." Jake ordered.

"I can't, I've lost too much biomass..." Jen apologized shamefully.

"...In that case, eat the dead Vampires. You're spoiled for choice." Jake shook his head, suppressing his disgust.

"Gladly my Master." The Mimic thanked him obsequiously.

"And stop calling me Master."

"Yes Master."

"..."

A Mimic enjoying a meal, that was worth watching. Once the chest was opened, it became as loud as a vacuum cleaner and just as effective at cleaning a room. The charred Vampire mush that littered the hallway was quickly devoured. A moment later, Remus Dracul reappeared at his side.

"Take back control of your clan and concoct a story to put Vhoskaud and the other Shapshifter Guilty at ease if they ask you any questions."

"As you wish Master."

Jen personally eliminated the few Vampires still alive, then after devouring them as well, he left the dungeons.

Jake then made his way to Wyatt's cell, and while trying not to vomit he began to put the puzzle together...

Chapter 736 I'll Take It

Fortunately, although the cutting was crude enough to make the task insolvable in a short time, his intelligence and powers of observation were not what they once were. To become a competent Aetherist and warrior he had long ago memorized the human anatomy and those of many other species by heart.

Putting each piece of Wyatt in its place was no picnic, but the process, nauseating as it was, took only a few minutes. If he hadn't been forced to dry the Vampire's drowned limbs and organs, it would have taken only a few seconds.

After putting the pieces back together, Jake frowned at the fact that Wyatt wasn't healing. His flesh was completely inert, but he could still feel his spiritual presence evenly distributed throughout his comatose cells. When Jake scanned him with his Oracle Device, he discovered that the once-vibrant Player was down to 0.01HP.

The good news was that even in this state, this last HP did not seem to be about to yield. On the other hand, there was no indication that he would be waking up anytime soon. His HP regen had fallen to 0, the Digitization clearly reflecting his near-death state.

[He needs blood.] Xi reminded him tactfully as she watched Jake admire his masterpiece.

"I know." He said, "I was just wondering if all vampires are as tough as he is. While I don't envy his condition, his near immortality is truly enviable. If all the Myrtharian Nerds were as tough as he is, I wouldn't have to worry about them."

[... You do realize that you have been practically disintegrated twice and are still alive to boast about it, right?] Xi snorted, completely bluffed out by his nerve.

"That's different. If I didn't have my Aether Sun Core, it would take me a long time to rebuild my body. Not to mention the fact that it would dilute my Bloodline. To recover, it would actually take me several weeks or months under normal circumstances."

[... Yeah, my guess is that if Wyatt got disintegrated like you did, he'd be quite happy to recover in a few months...] Xi coughed in a stifled voice.

"Well, whatever, here we go." Jake half-heartedly slashed open his wrist with one of his claws, then clenching his fist he poured a few cups of his blood on Wyatt's body.

He didn't need to pour the blood into his mouth, the skin of a Vampire Progenitor was already a blood sponge. As soon as the first drop of his blood touched Wyatt's skin, it was absorbed inside and a pinkish tinge spread across its surface. Within seconds all the blood was absorbed and the Vampire's reattached body, which had been held together only by the power of his telekinesis, finally reconnected.

Once the activity of his cells was revived, Wyatt demonstrated his prodigious regenerative abilities. The

lesions closed in an instant and twenty seconds later he opened his eyes, a complicated expression between gratitude and embarrassment flashing across his face.

"Thank you. I owe you one." Wyatt sighed as he stood up.

"Don't thank me, they got Carmin and the others." Jake shook his head.

The Vampire looked frazzled and disoriented, but his recent injuries had nothing to do with his condition. Jake knew very well why, and he made allowances. Wyatt had been in a perpetual drowning for a number of hours or days and in some ways it was worse than immolating his Spirit Body as he had done for the past three months.

The main difference was that Jake had agreed to undergo this torture on his own free will. He could stop as soon as he couldn't stand it anymore. Wyatt, on the other hand, did not know how long this torture would last and the dismemberment of his body made him totally helpless. Added to this was the concern for Carmin and his other subordinates.

"Selen?" Wyatt inquired suddenly. She had been with him when he had been trapped.

"No idea, but if she was with you when you were captured, she should be here if they didn't kill her." Jake replied without confidence.

"I see..."

The young man had regained his alert gaze and suddenly thinking of something, his face broke down in despair, panic evident on his face. His left hand squeezed his right wrist and feeling only a tiny response, his heart sank.

"Those bastards! They took almost all of my liquid alloy..."

Jake didn't say anything. He could have very well given him some of his personal stock of liquid alloy, but they weren't close enough to justify such generosity. By saving him, he felt he had done more than his share. Wyatt knew to whom he was indebted, and he made no unwelcome demands either.

"Let's look for Selen first, we'll worry about saving Carmin and the others later." Jake stated factually, ending his embarrassment.

"Okay."

As they explored the rest of the dungeon to find Selen and the other subordinates of his Faction who had joined him in the last three months, Jake filled him in on what had happened in the meantime, including the crucial role of Vhoskaud, the Shapeshifter Player and the fake Remus. After that, he also told him what he had learned from the Mimic.

The ease with which Jake had so easily foiled Vhoskaud and Remus' evil scheme left Wyatt in awe. That Jake could kick the ass of an army of Vampires didn't surprise him. That was definitely his forte. But that the meticulously planned ambush of a Player with a higher Oracle Rank than him had failed was the real surprise of the day.

Of course, as one might have guessed, neither Vhoskaud nor the Shapeshifter Player had the required Oracle Rank to predict Jake's movements. The Shapeshifter had simply lied to destabilize him and Vhoskaud had lied to his Shapeshifter buddy to convince him to participate in his capture plan.

The reality was actually much more complex and funny than that. Vhoskaud did have a higher Oracle Rank than Jake, but that was only when Jake wasn't using his Oracle Skills like Oracle Cloaking and Promotion.

After his near defeat three months ago, Jake had learned the hard way that he now had to deal with many players who were just as talented or more talented than he was. Even with absolute confidence in his strength, he was lucid enough to understand that an enemy who could predict his movements was an enemy he didn't have a chance against.

That's why, a few days into his training, he had activated his Oracle Cloaking. What was magical about this skill was that it didn't simply make him disappear from the radar of the enemy Oracle Devices. The Oracle Paths involving him continued to be calculated, but based on the last known information about him.

Unless the enemy Player had an Oracle Rank difference of three or more ranks, their entire plan was based on the abilities and stats preceding his massive power-up. It should not be forgotten that his Oracle Cloaking was a bit special. As a custom reward offered by Ancient Designer Xion Zolvhur, his level 1 had the same performance as the lvl2 Oracle Skill of the same name. Even with the Oracle Skill Promotion, the enemy had little chance of outperforming him. .

So their evil plot was bound to fail.

What Jake and Wyatt didn't know, however, was that Vhoskaud hadn't planned this alone. Somewhere far away, a cataclysmic quarrel was about to break out.

After a few minutes of exploration, the duo found Selen's cell. Luckily for her, she had only been sentenced to Eternal Drowning. After flushing out the water of her lungs and consuming some blood she recovered without any problem.

Her mental strength was unfortunately far from Wyatt's. For a long time after waking up, she continued to shake like a leaf, her face turning livid every time she saw a coffin or a puddle of water. The bone deep haughtiness of the pro-pureblood Vampire lolita had been eradicated, but another method would probably have been better.

The six other Vampires from Wyatt's Pureblood faction who had joined him were found in the nearby

cells. Like Seren, they were fine, but their mental state left something to be desired. Wyatt was heartbroken to see them so fragile and his anger at their plotters only grew.

Now that they were free, Jake went back to exploring the dungeons, but this time with a very different focus. Carefully reading the wooden signs nailed to each door, he continued forward until he halted in front of a peculiar one

[Prisoner #7103: Vlad Dracul: The Vampire Progenitor's sole brother, he committed fratricide in year 7 of this era to take his place. Incompetent, lecherous and a lazy leader, his cruelty was matched only by his vile nature. Since then the Dracul clan lost its hegemonic position and continued to slowly deteriorate until Grimwald Dracul deposed him in the year 114 and forced him to accept the Eternal Rest.

Sentence: Eternal Rest]

His treatment was different from other prisoners. Because of his status as the former leader of the clan for over 900 years, and brother of the Original Vampire of the Dracul clan, they could not punish him for his crimes. The Eternal Rest was a meager punishment for such an infamous criminal, but it allowed them to get rid of him for good.

For Jake, it was a godsend and he never thought he'd find such a rare gem. A Vampire Progenitor in perfect condition just waiting to be studied, sold or dissected!

"Good, I'll take it." Jake laughed happily.

Continuing his walk, he took his fill of the dungeon, snatching six more talented criminals from other clans to add to his collection of guinea pigs. Finally, after a long walk he reached the end of the dungeons and stopped in front of the last cell.

[Prisoner #9888: Grimwald Dracul]

Chapter 737 Romeo And Juliet

[Leader of the Dracul Clan since the year 914 of this era, his secret relationship with Xaverie Zangruth nearly caused the clan's extinction. The birth of Aisling, a hybrid, and his desire to protect her also betrayed all the Vampire values, proving that he was no longer fit to lead the Draculs.

Sentence: Eternal Rest]

As with Vlad Dracul, whose body had been stolen by Jake, Grimwald Dracul had only been condemned to a premature sleep. His deeds and past reputation did not justify his execution or a harsh sentence, but he had to be disposed of.

Based on what Jen, the fake Remus, had told him, Jake now knew that the Demons had not acted alone. It was a safe bet that Xaverie Zangruth, despite being a Demoness, had truly loved him and the Demon clans had made good use of their romance to further their darkest designs.

The Demons had official and unofficial allies in all the Factions as the recent Battle of the Council had illustrated. The Shapeshifters were among them.

Unlike Remus, Grimwald was a tough nut to crack. Like Haynt or Kenway, capturing or killing him would require far too many sacrifices and was impossible to accomplish discreetly if he refused to leave Laudarkvik.

On the other hand, his righteousness, sense of honor and duty were noble traits that his enemies could easily exploit. Thus, Remus, who was clearly weaker and more incompetent, was killed and replaced by Jen before the demons made use of the information obtained by Xaverie to launch their attack. The fake Remus then blamed him for these crimes and invoked his sense of honor to warrant his arrest and renunciation of the throne.

The target of this attack was an open secret, but rumor had it that the goal of this nighttime assault was the secret crypt of the Dracul clan. If this was the case, all of the clan's Vampire Ancestors who had chosen to enter the Eternal Rest of their own free will had fallen into the Demons' hands. No one knew what happened to those old, sleeping Vampires.

Jake didn't know the whole story, but the Mimic had said that without Xaverie's cooperation, the Demons could never have succeeded. The bottom line was that all demons, without exception, were inherently evil. They might love, protect, fight for a cause, have ambition and even feel compassion, but their preconceived sense of morality was distorted.

To put this in perspective from a human's point of view, most anthropological studies concluded that humans were inherently good. One could be selfish, cruel, lecherous and violent, but with the exception of psychopaths, most people, including infants, instinctively knew when they were hurting someone. If they didn't realize it, as soon as they did, they would feel bad or guilty about it.

It was only as they grew up that they would learn to make sense of things, to toughen up. Those who ended up becoming big name criminals like mafia bosses or drug barons had simply learned to disregard their conscience in order to prioritize their personal interests or those of their families. In private, they could still be loving fathers and mothers, good friends and wonderful lovers.

With Demons it was exactly the opposite. Whether they were born from the miasma resulting from negative thoughts or whether their species was categorized as such, what they all had in common was that they were born fundamentally evil.

A young Demon would feel bad, feel guilty when it wasn't doing anything wicked. Depending on the type of demon, they might have their own specialties and fetishes, but that was pretty much the idea. Unlike humans, as they grew up they were also influenced by their environment and experiences and in some cases they ended up adopting a behavior and moral code that went against their instincts.

Xaverie Zangruth, Aisling's mother, was a prime example of this particular type of Demon. Her actions,

her way of life, were appalling to her own people, but her strength was such that none of them dared hold it against her.

However, as with the above example regarding humans, she could act like an angel and even indulge in such a role, but when she returned to her true nature, she was as evil and twisted as any Demon.

Grimwald Dracul's mistake had been to forget this truth when he fell madly in love with her.

The reason Aisling's existence was so controversial was that neither the Vampires nor the Demons were able to trust her. Her ambivalent nature made her unable to fit into either clique. She was an outcast and that was why she had gathered the other Mutants and other hybrids that everyone else spurned to form her own faction.

With all this information in mind, Jake weighed the pros and cons, but eventually decided to wake Grimwald. The Oracle Scan indicated that he was lvl 91, which put him in the same league as Haynt. Not including the old vampires from the crypts that the demons had ransacked, he was the highest level Vampire still alive in Quanoth.

As with Wyatt and his subordinates, Jake sprinkled some of his blood on him and waited for the magic to work. The revival took longer than for Wyatt and the others. Perhaps it had something to do with the length of the Eternal Rest.

About five minutes later, he opened his eyes.

"Who are you?"

His voice was hoarse like that of a parched person, but his serene face was as tranquil as a waveless lake. When he asked this simple question, there was nonetheless a kind of regal aura emanating from him, betraying his immense past glory and his used to ruling.

"A friend of Aisling's. I'm afraid I have some bad news for you." Jake apologized with a polite smile.

"Speak."

Jake spoke and Grimwald listened in silence as he lay still to let the blood within him regenerate his strength. Several times his eyebrows furrowed, but at no time did he show any sign of panic or annoyance. It would seem that he had long been suspicious of the circumstances of his arrest.

When Jake was done filling him in, Grimwald wiggled his fingers as if testing their response, then rose from his coffin.

pANDA NOVEL "We've got work to do. And I have revenge to exact." The weakened Vampire declared flatly but with a fierce glint seething in his ruby eyes.

Now that he was standing before him, Jake finally saw the resemblance to his daughter Aisling. The young woman got her crimson hair and horns from her mother Xaverie, but most of her facial features she owed to her father.

Grimwald was a handsome man who looked about twenty years old when he was almost 950. Like Remus, he was a dark-haired man with an innate charisma, but unlike Remus, he had the mannerisms and look of a seducer. Each of his gestures was an ode to flirtation, as if he had spent his whole life perfecting his game to enthrall the crowd.

No wonder a demoness like Xaverie fell in love with him. Even desiccated with parched skin, he was still able to capture the hearts of the ladies. Before he was condemned, the number of groupies worshipping him numbered in the thousands.

Accompanied by Grimwald, Jake then stealthily left the Draculs' headquarters the same way he had come, using his improvised Stealth Spell. The duo immediately left the city without attracting attention, returning to Jake's previous hideout. When they arrived they found Wyatt, Selen and his other subordinates waiting for them.

Jake made introductions, then recapped what he had learned from Jen and explained his own intentions.

"I have only one goal. To save my friends and show them what I'm made of." He concluded with a creepy sparkle in his eyes after a long litany. "Who wants to fight alongside me?"

Wyatt became solemn, but without hesitation, he joined in. Saving Carmin was not up for debate. Grimwald stood silent. His mere presence here indicated his support. The problem came with Wyatt's subordinates.

The young Vampire Progenitor thought they would be eager to take revenge and save their friend, but the reality turned out to be much starker. The punishment they had just endured had deeply traumatized them, and the mere mention of attacking the perpetrators caused them to have an anxiety attack that manifested itself in a disturbing episode of hyperventilation. Their PTSD would not go away in a short time and they were temporarily dead weight.

The only one who chose to tag along was Selen, but she was shaking so hard when she said it that Jake took pity on her and ordered her to rest. With a wry smile on his face, Wyatt could only agree.

"Let's go."

The crack trio then sped through dozens of mountains, forests, hills, plains, and lakes at unimaginable speed. They were so fast that their figures were beyond blurred, no human eye could lock onto them.

A few moments later, and more than 500km west of Laudarkvik in the middle of the Wilderness, the trio spotted a fortress. Jake and Wyatt were hardly surprised, but Grimwald was stunned when he saw it. He

was certain that this fortress did not exist in his time.

While he slept, things had apparently changed dramatically.

Chapter 738: First Clash With Lost Divinity

Somewhere within the towering fortress that Jake, Wyatt and Grimwald had just sighted, their foes were peering back at them.

In a huge spherical room as large as five soccer fields, a huge circular stone table with exactly the same aspect, color, and texture as the floor, wall, and ceiling stood in its center, taking up more than half of the available space. It was as if the table had been carved right into the ground, from the same boulder that was used to erect this fortress.

Around this gigantic table, dozens of thrones of different sizes were distributed equidistantly from each other. The material from which they had been modelled was exactly the same as that of the table and the rest of the fortress. Even more amazing, the base of these thrones were one with the floor, no signs of glue or demarcation lines indicating that these thrones had been placed here after their creation.

Obviously, these thrones too were carved from the same boulder as the table and the whole fortress.

On each of these thrones sat comfortably a Player, but some were absent, their presence substituted by holographic versions of themselves. Thanks to some technology or spell, these Players could see and interact with the other members as if they were present in person. Truly amazing.

"They're here." A hooded android, one of the few standing sheepishly between two thrones, grumbled in a voice tinged with annoyance and resentment.

"Bah! They wouldn't be here if you had done your job properly." Shamash scoffed contemptuously as he glared at the android Lich.

The dark-skinned man in his sixties was still shirtless, wearing the same baggy black pants, purple belt, bandana, and heavy gold medallion of rectangular pieces. The dagger he wielded three months earlier was nowhere in sight, but the huge saw he wore on his shoulder was planted vertically in the ground to the left of his throne. He could grab the handle of his weapon at any moment.

Vhoskaud flinched with anger at being belittled, but he held back. He wasn't with the Replicators here, but in a secret fortress of Lost Divinities.

Because of the influence of their two respective main factions, which were veritable behemoths on the scale of the Mirror Universe, they tended to favor cooperation with each other when possible, but they were definitely not allies.

"Don't be so hard on Vhoskaud." An elegant rock giant over 15 meters tall in a seated position stood up for the Lich android with a laugh. "None of us could have predicted that they would be defeated so easily. I recall that Cypher was with him."

This giant sported vaguely human features, but his musculature was insane. The kind of rock covering his body was not ordinary, and by way of armor deposits of diamonds, gems and other precious metals were encrusted on its surface.

However, what completely refuted the thesis as to his humanity was his eight globular violet eyes littering what served as his face. The alien had neither mouth, nor nose, nor ear, but by vibrating the rock of its skull low and articulate sounds were coming out.

Anyone who was attentive would have noticed that the rock of his throne and the surrounding ground were rippling at a peculiar frequency with each of his movements. He was most likely the one who created this fortress and the respect the other players present showed him was the most telling evidence of that.

"Nucnar, you are too lenient." A smaller alien, but a thousand times more hideous, snickered at the giant. "You know the purpose of Lost Divinities. Every member we lose is not a mere setback. Cypher was not an important member, but he was one of us, not a mere underling.

As he made this remark, his tiny white eyes focused on the three-meter tall bearded barbarian sitting two seats away. Sensing that this jab was directed at him, Azeus immediately felt insulted and a multi-colored lightning bolt began to crackle around him. Nevertheless, he did not strike back.

After all, it was the truth. He was not really one of them, but a mere subordinate on probation. The other, less overt reason... was that this alien was scaring the crap out of him. If Jake were here he would have recognized this Azeus as the creep who had struck down the refugees in the convoy three months earlier.

The hideous alien he didn't dare answer to was named Belakor and was a devil prince as described in the Bible and in the most horrific myths. Besides being only slightly smaller than his fellow Nucnar, his appearance and smell could make even the most hardened war veteran vomit his guts out. As such, he was very different from the ravishing Archdemons with human features like Hecate or Xaverie. He was a pure product of evil, his appearance matching his evilness.

A thick skin of a purplish blue reminiscent of decaying flesh, a pair of membranous wings streaked with black veins, several pairs of horns and spikes on his skull and back of a sickly yellow color, no hair and a jaw so wide that it stretched from under his nose to his pubic bone. The inside was lined with long, razor sharp teeth. Every time he spoke his long, serpentine, candy-blue tongue swung in the air sending a flood of ink-black sprays in front of him.

As it landed on the table, the rock would instantly melt on contact. A massive sword, whose blade seemed to house hell itself, lay in his lap, one of its claws mechanically tapping it with a metronome like beat.

The paramount beauty sitting directly to his right, and pitifully tiny compared to him, stood straight as an arrow, her eyes closed, her complexion pallid. Her voluptuous bosom never rose as if she had given up on the thought of breathing. Well, she had. In order to endure Belakor's stench, she had resolved to hold her breath until the briefing was over.

The other players present couldn't help but give her lecherous looks tinged with compassion, but none of them were willing to swap places with her.

With that, the members of the emergency council began to bicker, each raising their voices more than the previous speaker. Vhoskaud wanted revenge, but he had neither the authority nor the prestige to make himself heard, let alone convince them to be wary of Jake. Others like Shamash, Azeus or the

breathless beauty chose to remain silent, but Nucnar and Belakor were as big as they were loud and they were willing to do whatever it took to defend their point of view.

The rock giant Nucnar was not afraid of anything or anyone. He was extremely confident in his stronghold and was of the opinion to crush the three approaching worms to kill two birds with one stone. Despite his attitude, Belakor shared his opinion, but he felt it was beneath him to cower in that fortress to take out such insignificant enemies.

Others advocated caution, but their voices were barely audible compared to those of these two brutes. And then there was the absent majority speaking out through their holograms. As far as they were concerned, this matter was none of their business and they didn't care about the final decision. All they knew was that they had absolute confidence in Lost Divinities and their comrades.

There was only one individual whose muteness differed from the silent majority. Standing about 6 meters tall, he resembled in every way a Spartan warrior of the legends, but his armor was hundreds of times more advanced. His skin was like bronze, his long hair sticking out of his helmet like golden threads, and his muscles hard as steel. A long blood-red cape tied to his golden shoulder pad fell to his ankles, which combined with the crest of the same color of his helmet gave him a certain dash.

But beyond his looks, it was his constantly furrowed sword-like eyebrows, his calm, clear blue eyes and his perfect manly face that drew the eye. His only flaw was perhaps his large aquiline nose that hardened his features and gave him a devious look, but perhaps that was also what gave him such charisma.

"Silence."

One word. Delivered in a whisper, barely louder than a murmur. But when he spoke, all fell silent, including the two brutes Nucnar and Belakor. When he was pleased to have their attention, he smiled graciously at them and nodded to the anxious Lich,

"First of all, don't disrespect Vhoskaud. He is not one of us, but he is under the protection of one of our Thanatos. Even if he failed, I'm sure he did his best. As long as we kill this human, the mission will resume as normal."

The android immediately displayed a relieved expression and he bowed gratefully. The Spartan warrior then turned to Nucnar and rebuked him sternly,

"Your arrogance will get you killed. You of all people should understand the consequences of underestimating your enemies. Until we have a full understanding of the capabilities of these three intruders, we will use this fortress to welcome them."

Not having finished his sermon, he then admonished Belakor,

"If you are so anxious to prove your worth, I will allow you to test the enemy, but only once they are inside the fortress. If you disobey and find yourself in mortal danger, not only will you receive no help, but I will personally finish you off. Am I clear?"

The demon grunted moodily as he stared at him in hatred, but eventually complied.

"Very clear, sir."

"Good. Now, Vhoskaud, tell us what you know about-"

BOOOOMMM!

Just as calm and order had been restored, a comet-like object struck the center of the table, instantly shattering it into pieces. The collapsed rock roof fell on the seated Players, shouts of panic or anger breaking out here and there as the holograms sizzled out of existence one after the other.

Chapter 739: You Smell Good

Not all the Players in the room reacted in the same way to this surprise collapse. The hologram representatives were obviously helpless from wherever they were and calmly accepted their dismissal.

A few flesh-and-blood members made up the bulk of the screams, but most of them were really just the subordinates and other bodyguards providing security for their superiors. The brutal truth was that the Players sitting on those stone thrones didn't need their help at all.

Ignoring the panicked cries and grunts of pain from their pawns, Nucnar and Belakor snorted loudly without moving from their seats. A single sneeze from the rock giant restructured the stone table in front of him and stopped the falling rubble dead in its tracks. When he lifted a finger from his armrest, the debris turned around, the destroyed ceiling rebuilding itself as if one were turning back time.

The devil Belakor didn't have as much magical control over the rock as his rival, but he didn't need these magic tricks to prove he was in no danger. At ease, one of his huge membranous wings covered the top of his head like an umbrella and he let the projectiles pour down on him with utter indifference.

Some of the boulders weighed several tons, but the muscles holding his wing in place did not quiver a bit. One could have placed a full glass of water on his wing without any fear of the liquid spilling over.

Azeus slalomed casually between the rocks raining down on him, his body turned into a trail of lightning. Shamash didn't move either, a kind of spectral monster as huge as Belakor rising from his shadow to protect him and take the damage for him.

Vhoskaud was instantly crushed by a solid boulder five times his size, but his lack of reactivity proved that he hadn't really tried to defend himself. He just wanted a good excuse to extricate himself from this mess.

Then, the beauty who had been holding her breath for a while trotted elegantly under the wing of the demon Belakor, pinching her nose, determined to use it as a shield. Despite her reluctance, she showed no signs of worry or nervousness.

"Thank you big boy." She winked at him, a blush appearing on the demon's flushed cheeks. If the other Players weren't too busy dodging the falling debris, they would have been deeply shocked.

Well, the Spartan warrior who seemed to command them was the one who had the most banal, but also by far the most impressive response: He did not move at all.

Stoic, he let the debris hit him without flinching, continuing to stare intently at the crater in the dead center of the table. When a rock weighing several dozen tons fell on him, it ricocheted off his helmet with a chime. The rock broke in two on impact, each half sliding down his shoulders before falling away from his throne intact.

In this brief altercation, the threat level of each Player had been made clear. Jake frowned as he discovered the meager returns from his grand entrance. He had obviously spotted these exceptional Players, and recognized Azeus and Shamash whose names he still did not know.

As the survivors recovered from the cave-in, coughing up dust, Jake suddenly heard someone speak to him,

"I presume you are this Jake Wilderth that Vhoskaud has told us so much about." The Spartan declared apathetically as he gauged his appearance.

Seeing the network of lava veins running through his body there was only genuine curiosity. But not the pleasing curiosity of a child eager to learn, but rather the condescending wonder when an elephant met an ant that was a little bit plumper than the others.

"And you are...?" Jake inquired coldly. Since the man he was dealing with did not hide his contempt, he had all the reasons to do likewise.

Underneath his impassive façade, an alarmed bell had just rung in his head. Vhoskaud? This name was not unknown to him. It was that of the Lich sitting on the Council of Laudarkvik. One of the two Undead leaders!

Scanning the huge room with his mind he had already found the remains of the Lich android, who had just been destroyed for the third time since the beginning of this Ordeal. Separately, these two pieces of information were nothing to worry about, but together they became an earthshaking revelation.

Because Vhoskaud was a Lich who had been ruling the Undeads of Quanoth for almost a thousand years. Since his arrival, Jake had done his homework and knew everything there was to know about the influential people of Laudarkvik and the Ret'Asi Empire in general.

The problem was that Vhoskaud was definitely a Player, just like them. There was no way he could have been on Quanoth that long or it would be completely unfair.

The Spartan sitting on his throne didn't show anything, but he was uncannily attentive. Just from his mental fluctuations, and his cursory glance at Vhoskaud's body, he grasped his enemy's dismay. In the face of such cluelessness, he could not help but chuckle sympathetically,

"Because you are ignorant of those you are antagonizing, I am willing to turn a blind eye to what has just happened if you swear not to interfere with our affairs again. Leave Laudarkvik today. With your talent, you can certainly finish this Ordeal with flying colors. Why risk everything in the name of a vain friendship?"

Wrong move. Reminding Jake why he was there only solidified his resolve. It didn't matter whether or not Vhoskaud was a Player or a native of Quanoth. That hadn't stopped him from getting smashed every time they met. If he could beat him thrice, he could beat him a fourth time, then a fifth.

In the meantime, if he wanted to save Carmin, Elduin and the others, he had to fight these Players. Giving up negotiating, he snarled spitefully,

"Where are Carmin and the others?"

"Carmin?" The giant Spartan raised a confused eyebrow. "Belakor?" UPDATE FROM we did capture one Aisling, but Carmin... She must be one of the Mutants we captured along with her." The hideous demon hesitated briefly before bursting into laughter as it spewed acid in all directions.

A vein swelled on Jake's forehead as he felt the alien's mirth. He had decided he would start with this jerk. The Spartan didn't miss the Myrtharian's impatience and quietly coughed into his fist to pull the demon back into the conversation,

"Belakor, are they alive?"

"Hmmm, let me check."

As arrogant and brash as he was, Belakor was a model of obedience brimming with obsequiousness in front of this Spartan yet almost four times smaller than him. After tapping several buttons embedded in the stone table, recently rebuilt by Nucnar, several hundred real-time video camera recordings appeared before them.

There were many prisoners, but Jake recognized Carmin and his other companions at a glance. When he saw what state they were in, he immediately erupted in rage.

"So... who is this Car-" Belakor sneered scornfully before his eyes became round as saucers as he saw a huge ball of plasma approaching his face.

"DIE!"

There was no changing a technique that worked. Grabbing his Aether Sun Core with both hands, Jake teleported in front of him and whacked him in the face with it. As big and tall as he was, the demon howled in pain as the fireball melted his skull, his bones and rotting flesh liquefying in an instant.

"YOU DARE!"

This vicious surprise attack aroused the wrath of the Players present. All but the Spartan and a few rare exceptions went on the attack, swarming over him like a cloud of locusts. Nucnar was at the forefront of the assailants.

As Jake was furiously roasting Belakor's head, he felt a sharp gust of wind warm the back of his neck. His hair instinctively stood on end at the impending danger and he teleported behind Belakor, leaving the Aether Sun Core in the same spot - that of a fishbowl with the demon's charred head inside.

As he retrieved the Aether Sun Core with his other hand, the huge steel club that caused the gust of wind struck the very spot where Jake had been standing a split second earlier. With no target to take the blow, the weapon continued on its trajectory, slamming violently into his comrade Belakor's charred jaw.

BAM!

The table and the rebuilt ceiling collapsed again. Jake, who had teleported behind Belakor, was also blown away by the blast before crashing into the opposite wall a few dozen meters away. While Jake, who weighed several tons, was blown away like a twig in the face of a hurricane, the other Players present were catapulted into the afterlife, their bones shattering all at once.

Just by the shockwave, one could imagine the sheer violence of such a collision. Nucnar was a rock giant of more than thirty meters, weighing several hundred tons. This explained some of its destructiveness, but not all. The giant's speed had shocked Jake.

Its speed wasn't even a tenth of Jake's, but when put into perspective with its mass, it took incredible strength. Even after his power-up, Jake was acutely aware that this giant was by far the Player with the greatest brute strength he had ever encountered in an Ordeal. It was an eye-opener.

Extracting himself unharmed from his wall crater, Jake squinted his eyes as he stared at the rock giant. At that moment, he felt a tickle on his ankle, as if a koala had curled up on it. Looking down, his eyes met the most beautiful woman he had ever met. At his confused look, the woman suddenly took a big, loud breath.

"Finally some fresh air!" She exhaled as she closed her eyes, oblivious to the fact that she had just escaped death. She then sniffed Jake's legplate and gave him a thumb up, "You smell good."

" ... "

Chapter 740: All Of Them Are Monsters

"Let go of my leg."

"Hmm? Oh your leg! Right!" She prattled theatrically as she gave him a mischievous wink. But she did not let go of his leg. On the contrary, she hugged him even more tightly, her chest pressing against his leg.

Jake's face darkened when he saw her familiarity with him. More importantly, the tickling sensation at his ankle had turned into a tingling sensation running up to his knee. She had perhaps clung to him to survive the attack of the rock giant, but she had also taken advantage of it to do something to him.

Upon further examination of his leg, Jake did find a strange energy permeating his armor. Although it was an Inferior Aether Artifact forged with precious metals his armor was unable to block the substance.

This energy was colorless and intangible, but it had a fragrance that affected not only his olfactory nerves but also his Spirit Body. The numbing sensation coming from his leg was not just an impression, the affected Spirit Body was also growing less and less responsive.

"GET OFF ME!" Jake shook his leg violently, sending her waltzing with a kick.

Once he was attacked, he would not give any special treatment to his enemies. This woman may have been charming and unbelievably beautiful, but from the moment she targeted him, he lumped her in with his other opponents.

Therefore, to get rid of her he had kicked her as hard as he could. Unlike Nucnar and Belakor, she was of normal size, and even rather slender and delicate. The only huge part of her body was her bosom.

When the tip of Jake's foot planted itself in her navel, her body arched like a taut bow and her hefty breasts jutted forward from the sudden acceleration. It might have turned on some horny freaks if the pressure of the kick hadn't emptied all of her stomach of its stomach acid.

BANG!

Jake dodged the young woman's breakfast with a calculated backward leap, while the beauty crashed like a meatball into one of the few walls still intact. The spartan, who was on the same side and still sitting on his throne, turned over briefly to check her condition, then he rolled his eyes, unfazed.

And indeed, this kick although capable of ripping open a tank had not been enough to finish her off.

"Cough, cough! Gallantry today is not what it used to be..." She crawled painfully out of the crater, her deformed limbs forming disturbing angles.

As if she was alone in the world and that there was nothing embarrassing about it, she got rid of her torn dress which hindered her movements, then put back each of her joints in place while letting people hear pops and cracking noises giving them goosebumps. Her damaged bones and internal organs also recovered in an instant.

It was only after her joints were back in place that she slipped on a new white dress identical to the previous one and breathed a sigh of relief.

"Mwahaha! Ashun, it looks like you've lost your charm, haha." Nucnar guffawed loudly at the sight of the young woman's decrepit state. "I guess old age spares no one, not even the gods."

"You!!!"

The rock giant, who had just now crushed the roasted skull of his comrade Belakor, felt no guilt and still found the heart to tease the mysterious beauty. His steel club rested comfortably on the headless torso of his victim and he seemed in no hurry to remove it.

"Nucnar, when are you going to get your weapon off my neck?!" An angry voice exploded from the demon's chest where his long, jagged mouth stretched down.

Belakor wasn't dead yet!

Jake might have expected it, but he was still shaken. After all, he too had recovered from injuries worse than this. Wyatt had not long ago been locked in jars chopped into small pieces. However, it was one thing to be able to do that and another to realize that there was nothing unique about one's apparent immortality.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, haha." Nucnar roared with laughter again before reluctantly lifting his club. At first glance, his apology seemed sincere, but his eyes sparkled with delight. It didn't take a mind reader to see that he was very proud of his screw-up.

A tiny head, as hideous as the previous Belakor's, but more juvenile, quickly sprouted at the top of the demon's neck before quickly maturing to its normal size.

Jake became increasingly grim as the process went on. None of these Players were normal. Each of them was a true monster.

Whether it was the "fragile" beauty who could take one of his kicks, the rock giant who hit even harder than he did, or the demon who could survive the most vicious attacks, each possessed rare abilities sought after by the other Evolvers.

What particularly shocked Jake was that he could not feel any signs of weakening. When Jake was regenerating from such a serious injury, such as decapitation or grievous wounds, his Vitality would speed up his metabolism and provide the energy, but the nutrients had to come from somewhere. He couldn't really make matter out of nothing.

Normally, this energy would be drawn from his biomass. Every time he healed from lethal wounds, he lost weight. The Aether stored in his cells would also be lost and his Bloodline would be weakened. For this reason, he feared amputations and usually did his best to recover the blood lost in battle.

When he had his back to the wall, he could nevertheless rely on the environment to compensate for this deficiency. This was the role of his Aether Sun Core. As long as there was heat, soil and light, Jake would never really run out of energy and nutrients.

What shocked Jake in this case, to be more exact, was not the lack of signs of weakening, but the fact that he couldn't identify the actual source of their power. His Myrtharian Eyes flickered intensely, their galactic glow penetrating their flesh and their secrets, but what he saw was beyond comprehension.

Belakor had several Energy Cores of different kinds within him, but they were dormant. They were not what sustained his perfect regeneration. The energy and matter required for this miracle really seemed to come out of nowhere, as if it had sprung from nothing in the same way as Aether.

His gaze then swept over the other Players present and he noticed that their anatomical structures were all different, but they too seemed to be sustained by an unknown energy source. It wasn't obvious in the others, but the beauty had seen her spine shattered and her gut displaced by Jake's kick. Yet, she too had recovered safely.

The only one, who did not move an inch and was content to observe the events on his throne, was the Spartan. He seemed fascinated by Jake's reaction, but also admired his composure. Most Evolvers would have fled when they realized that none of their attacks were working.

Jake wasn't going to run. On the contrary, he was even more determined to deal with them to remove this unpredictable threat hanging over his head.

Suddenly, the Aether Sun Core resurfaced in his left hand and a mystical sword in his right. Since his last power-up, he no longer feared the surface heat of his artificial sun, but the core temperature was still too much even for him. The sword in his right hand was the Tempest Sword, his recent acquisition or rather confiscation of Qewie's weapon.

Upon seeing a Bronze Aether Artifact and the familiar plasma ball reappear, the remaining Lost Divinities Players stopped bickering. Belakor brandished his huge infernal sword for the first time with a serious expression.

Nucnar surprisingly distanced himself, clasping his hands together to erect a defensive formation of rocky ridges around him. The beauty Ashun shamelessly took refuge inside. Azeus, Shamash and the other hooded Players also moved into fighting position, encircling him with almost symbiotic cooperation.

Then, without anyone signaling to attack, chaos erupted in the room. A huge purple bolt of lightning struck the floor where Jake had been standing a fraction of a second earlier, shattering the floor with a deafening thunderclap. The Aether Sun Core popped up to Belakor's left, smashing his head again.

Brazen, the demon showed incredible agility as his head and torso bent 90 degrees backward, narrowly dodging the ball of flame. Accompanying his tilt, his heavy sword split the air in a brutal upward swing and Jake deflected the huge blade with his short Tempest Sword.

Belakor cringed in anticipation as he saw him attempt to parry his weapon, but what followed soon made him cringe. With little effort, Jake blocked the sword with his own, his body suspended in the air despite the impact while he had no support. Then the Tempest Sword showed the world once again what earned it its Bronze Artifact status.

The technique that even the Oracle Shield could not intercept manifested itself again. After repelling the demon's strike, his blade with its own chaos microcosm lengthened instantly from one meter to five meters. Stunned, Belakor displayed his experience as he felt the tremendous flood of energy contained within the blade.

An Oracle Shield covered him just in time and he even generated a second one to sandwich Jake inside. Jake pressed on with his thrust, but an Oracle Shield also encased his body to nullify the danger.

Belakor had already regained his cool as the enemy blade drew closer to his heart in slow motion, but the next second his eyes bulged with shock as an energy storm blasted the entire left side of his chest. Compared to Qewie, Jake could mobilize the full power of the weapon.

Without blinking, Jake then swung his arm upward to split the demon's head in two, but the demon was abruptly yanked backward when a harpoon pierced his shoulder. Groaning in pain, Belakor was pulled backwards in extremis, narrowly escaping an even worse death than his previous decapitation.

When Jake spotted the harpoon's owner, he saw that the Spartan was in a javelin-throwing position, a coil of rope held firmly in his other hand. Comically, he was still sitting on his throne.