

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 163 - Slave Contract

For a few more seconds, the two mercenaries continued to struggle in vain to escape Jake's control, their leg and arm muscles twitching and contracting at regular intervals. After a long effort that left them in a sweaty state, they realized the truth. They couldn't move.

'What do you want from us? We haven't done anything wrong!

'Lamine yelled, his lower jaw trembling from fury and humiliation. He had to raise his head to talk to his tormentor and it was extremely embarrassing.

'Not done anything wrong? 'Jake slowly stared at the still unconscious young woman on Yerode's shoulder and then gazed again at the sniper in the eyes. 'Are you fucking kidding me? '

'Puh! It's the truth. This woman belongs to us. Lamine signed a Slave Contract with her. 'Yerode argued by spitting a big fat slob on the floor for good measure.

'A slave contract? 'Jake repeated in an icy tone, increasing his mental pressure until he forced them to put their foreheads against the ground.

He knew about the Pet Contract, since Crunch had agreed to one with him. He also knew that each creature had a value estimated by the Oracle System in the Mirror Universe and that anyone could be bought once the period of diplomatic immunity would be over. Of

course, active Players and Evolvers with at least a Rank 6 were the exception.

However, this was the first time he had heard of this contract and he had no idea under what circumstances it was signed. If it was the same principle as the Pet Contract, it only required the consent of the future slave, which was hard to imagine. If it was as simple as that to be enslaved, he would have to be particularly careful in the future.

‘It wasn’t us... who forced her... to sign. ‘Yerode growled in frustration as he gritted his teeth.

He, who hadn’t yet awakened his Seventh Stat, could feel an alien presence lurking around his mind, as if his thoughts were being exposed. Which was indeed the case.

Even if a person had a strong mind, without perceiving the Aether it was impossible to feel the connection of Jake’s mind to theirs. Unlike Crunch, their thoughts were more complex but also human, which made them easier to interpret actually. He still couldn’t translate thoughts into words, but he could feel whether they were telling him the truth or not.

Apparently, Yerode hadn’t lied. They hadn’t actually forced her to sign that contract.

‘Then who did?’ Jake asked.

‘...Her husband?’ Lamine said in a visibly uncertain tone.

Jake inspected the young woman in more detail and found her appearance familiar. Vase colored skin, though pretty, primitive fur as a tunic and fluorescent hair. Her ears were also slightly pointed.

Looking back quickly at his memories of before the Ordeal, he remembered the 2.5-metre giant who had challenged him to a duel to claim the girls in his group. Jake had stuck a bullet in his skull without qualms, which had ended the fight before it even started.

The women were indeed more petite and slender in this species and he remembered that a sort of orgy had taken place in their makeshift camp when they arrived at the Red Cube. These women did indeed appear to be slaves, although he blamed their behaviour on cultural differences and their primitiveness at the time.

‘And where is this husband?’ Jake asked again, loosening the control over their upper bodies so they could straighten up and answer.

‘ ... ‘

Tvu ojm quzhurfzaul ukhvfreut fr uqgfzzfllut immc.

‘ So ?‘

‘... We shot him a few minutes before entering the Black Cube. ‘Lamine confessed with an expression showing no remorse. ‘A good bullet between the eyes. There was another girl we played with before. Unfortunately, she was a little young. She didn’t make it...‘

Jake squinted and stared at them in turn, a heavy atmosphere quickly settling in between the two parties. Finally uncomfortable with this prolonged eye contact, Jake simply controlled their upper body to kiss the ground again with a resounding SMACK.

Because the two mercenaries were in perfect sync it felt like they were praying to their new god, which added considerably to their frustration. At that very moment their hatred for Jake was at its peak. A little more and they weren’t sure they would be able to restrain themselves.

‘That still doesn’t explain to me why she signed a Slave Contract with you.’ Jake said, changing the subject. This time he didn’t let them get up.

‘When that fluorescent orc thing died Lamine immediately got a notification from the Oracle System asking if he was willing to sign the Slave Contract. Of course, he agreed. You don’t turn down a good deal like that.’

Jake thought that once the slaver was dead that all the slaves under his authority would be set free again. That didn’t seem to be the case. A slave was doomed to remain a slave in the Mirror Universe if he couldn’t redeem his freedom.

‘What can you do with this contract?’ Jake questioned them one last time, especially worried about the answer.

‘Everything. Absolutely everything.’ Lamine broke out with a gravelly laugh. ‘The Slave may not disobey any order except one that would result in her immediate death, such as ceasing to breathe or jumping from a ravine. She’s our plaything right now and there’s nothing you can do about it.’

That was all well and good, but how did the Oracle enforce these contracts? Unless it was... Jake took a look at his own bracelet and got the confirmation he was looking for when he heard Xi’s guilty answer.

[I don’t have control over those contracts.] She apologized with a melancholy voice. [It is indeed the bracelet that enforces the contract.]

‘How?’ Jake didn’t want to hear the answer.

[Taking control of your brain. Some of the liquid alloy in the bracelet is circulating in your body. If the Oracle wishes, he can take control at any time...]

Yerode and Lamine could not see Jake's horrified expression, since they still had their foreheads glued to the ground, but his silence was worse for them than when he was posing questions. At least they felt they could negotiate. What if he just left and let them like this ?

Right now, Jake was seriously considering the idea of cutting off his forearm where the bracelet was as if it were an intolerable itch, but he immediately changed his mind. The metal was circulating in his bloodstream. No matter what he did, he had no way of fighting the Oracle's technology.

[Don't worry about that.] Xi gently reassured him. [If you play by the rules, the Oracle System is the most impartial being ever. After all, it is a program. It has to play by its own rules.]

'Mmm, it's what you think or think you know.' Jake replied curtly. "Who's to say your memories haven't been tampered with again?"

[... But I do know one thing. The Oracle is powerful enough to control everyone on B842, but it doesn't. Free will is important to it, but it has value, like everything else. As long as you have what it takes to protect your freedom, no one can take it away from you.]

[This woman is a slave because she agreed to sign this Slave Contract. It doesn't matter if she was threatened or she did it of her own free will. The facts are there. She gave up her freedom of her own free will.]

lo jfl f sfiat fzepquro. Cuzofariw, Jfcu hmpit guhmqu f lifsu jaovmpo f jaii gw ovu quzu dfho ovfo vu hfzzaut fr Ozfhiu tusahu arlatu vaq,

gpo ao film qufro ovfo frwmru laerare f hmrozfho jaov vaq ovzmpev ovu Ozfhiu Swlouq jfl fglmipouiw ozplojmozvw. lo huzofariw jmzcut dmz gplarull ozfrlfhoamrl, mz nzmqalul md frw cart.

Suddenly exhausted, Jake took one last look at the unconscious young woman, and then with a deep sigh resumed his walk to the nearest Orange Cube. After Jake passed by, Crunch discreetly pissed on the two mercenaries with the precision of an automatic sprinkler.

Once Jake was far enough, Yerode and Lamine felt the control of their bodies come back to them and then abruptly stood up flushed with anger and a visceral *désiré* to eviscerate the cat.

Bad luck for them, that was what the cat was waiting for. With a spark of mischief in his eyes, the cat sent two last shots of hot piss into the wide open mouths of the two mercenaries before running away behind his master.

Coughing and holding back with great pain from vomiting, they could only watch with hatred as the pair of wicked fiends disappeared with great disregard into the Orange Cube. It was a total humiliation.