

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 176 - Betrayal

While Jake sprinted at full speed towards the two ladies to be rescued, another scene was taking place a few dozen kilometers away.

‘Aegnor?! What the hell’s gotten into you?! You betray the ducal family after all these years of loyal service?!’ A young woman with medium-length pink hair cried out in false indignation, betraying a certain nervousness.

The Aegnor in question, a middle-aged man in heavy armor bearing the golden coat of arms of the Velsyos Empire - two symmetrical moon crescents joined at their ends - burst into a rocky laugh in response.

‘Good and loyal service? Don’t make me laugh Princess, or should I say Esya?’ Aegnor sneered with a lustful look. ‘The only reason you nobles have held on to power for so long is because you used your magic to oppress us. Tell me, Princess, how long did you think you’d keep the truth from us?’

Esya took two steps backwards in spite of herself, joining her older sister with longer hair who was pointing her sword at them with resignation. Farewell to the tight velvet dresses. To hunt Digestors, they had put on more practical men’s clothes, but their voluptuous

shapes and petite figure were not so easy to conceal. They had hoped to go unnoticed, but their plan had proved to be a failure.

At first, they had gone to the north of the Oracle City with the intention of hunting down a few Digestors within their reach, but soon something unexpected had happened.

The first Digestor horde that the two sisters had stumbled upon was so massive that they had absolutely no prospect of surviving a direct confrontation. Some of the Digestors in this horde exuded an intimidating aura, making them feel what a mouse stuck in a cage with a poisonous snake would have felt like.

Before they could even think of sneaking back to where they had come from, they had been spotted by a crackling twig. Since then, they had fled into the tall magenta grass with a huge pack of Digestors at their tail.

As the monsters' shrill cackles grew closer and closer, they had followed their Shadow Guide, hoping he would have a solution for them, but to no avail. Suddenly, though, the Shadow Guide had reappeared before them, as if the Oracle had heard their prayers.

The Shadow Guide had then changed direction, to the Southeast, instead of South, where the Oracle City was located. Not having had any bad experiences so far, the two sisters had chosen to trust their bracelet and had quickly reached a wood filled with trees with bluish trunks devoid of leaves. The grasses below were also much taller, greatly increasing their chance of losing the Digestors behind them.

The Digestors' squeals had indeed disappeared a few minutes later, but the sky had begun to darken as the sunset was masked by opaque black clouds full of lightning. Soon after, they had been

intercepted by their own guards and were now in a perilous situation.

At this very moment, the two sisters were confronted by two of the four Ducal guards who had been in charge of their close protection since birth. Aegnor was even the head of the Ducal Guard in their parents' duchy.

In addition to these two elite guards, about fifty other soldiers in armour and chain mail had surrounded them, blocking every escape route. Most of these soldiers had expressions that ranged from hatred, disdain or lust. One would have to be an idiot not to guess what fate awaited them.

'Who let the cat out of the bag?' Enya, who had constantly threatened them with her sword, decided to act in a straightforward manner. Denial was futile at this point.

Instead of answering her, the former Ducal Guard simply snapped his fingers and seconds later two other soldiers dragged a man with his hands tied and a cloth bag over his head in front of the Princess's feet. His dreadfully matching ceremonial clothes were covered in blood and one of his ankles was completely broken, the associated foot hanging limply in the wrong direction.

The disoriented nobleman was thrown to the ground and uttered a heart-rending shriek of pain. His knee had just hit a relatively sharp stone. Indifferent to his suffering, one of the soldiers forcibly removed the dark bag over his head.

The face of a young man with half-long turquoise hair revealed itself to them. His nose was broken, his lips were swollen and bloody, and two black eyes completed the picture.

In spite of the dim light of dusk, the nobleman behaved as if he were dazzled, not deigning to open his eyes. The truth was that he was too ashamed to look the two princesses in the face.

‘Altowin? Tell me what you did and don’t omit anything. ‘Enya ordered in a cold tone. This nobleman wasn’t one of their group. Where did he come from?’

‘There’s no need to torment him.’ The other Ducal guard, a man in his early fifties with brown hair and a nasty bowl cut, scoffed. ‘This idiot trusted his guards and servants so much that he told them the truth as soon as he arrived in the Mirror Universe. They all rebelled as soon as they became aware that he had no more power. He may be a good guy, but his father is a Water and Nature Archmage known for his tyranny and excruciatingly high taxes.’

Erwf vft f hzfxw télizè om lifn oval atamo md ovu jufiovw lm plut om guare mguwut frt luzsut ovfo vu vft imlo fii lurlu md zufiaow. Bpo ar ovu urt, lvu laqniw laevut gzaudiw gudmzu opzrare vuz foouroamr om Auermz.

‘Believe it or not, we’re different. It’s true that we can’t regenerate our mana, but that doesn’t mean we haven’t taken precautions. ‘Enya tried to intimidate them with her best poker face, but it wasn’t convincing enough. Not least because Esya next door showed nothing but pure anxiety.

‘ Oh? You mean that weird weapon you bought from that human from another world? ‘Aegnor snickered as he spread his arms. ‘ Or maybe all the Aether crystals that you and your sister and other nobles have monopolized for themselves alone, stealing the Aether earned by soldiers risking their lives to save your corrupt souls?’

‘Don’t make me laugh... I know that the heirs of the duchy have been taught the art of the sword since they were children, but don’t think it’s enough against hardened warriors like us.’

‘ ... ‘

Enya kept quiet this time. During her Ordeal, she had hoped to find a solution to her problem, but she had been forced to train for a long time under the sun. The tribe of natives where they had landed was primitive, forming a pitiful clay village in the middle of the savannah. Between the heat, the insects and their incessant ritual dances, it had been a real pain in the àss.

They had learned to wield some rudimentary weapons made of wood, bone and flint such as the àssegai, spear, slingshot or dagger, but they had none of these on B842. On top of that, their performance had been rather average compared to the other participants with them. This Ordeal had not allowed them to play any of their strong points.

Nevertheless, they still had enough credit to buy the Aether Skill Fire Ball lvl0. They had hoped to find out how to recharge their magic with it, but it didn’t work. An Aether skill lvl 0 was as useless as the level suggested.

It could be used to fool the unlearned minions or emit a bit of light, but when it came to destructive power, it clearly left a lot to be désirèd. Other than making bananas flambé or creme brulee, the spell was of little use. The only advantage was that it wasn’t particularly tiring. They could use it continuously.

‘Why don’t we have a little fun?’ The other Ducal Guard chuckled, raping her with his eyes as if he was inspecting a piece of meat ready to be cooked.

Or vufzare val nzmmlfi, qmlo md ovu qur ezarrut ar opzr, ukhvfreare ukhaout eifrhul. Tvu ojm lalouzl lommt gfhc om gfhc jaov fnnfzuro tulnfaz, gpo flatu dzmq f qazfhiu ovuw lfj rm jfw mpo md ovu raevoqfzu.

Before they could even react, two men rammed Esya from the side, brutally pinning her to the ground. No longer feeling her sister's touch against her back, Enya turned around in panic, but this mistake created the perfect opening for three other men to neutralize her in turn.

Both women were not weak after their Ordeal, but each of these men were experienced soldiers who had completed an Ordeal as well. Their teamwork was excellent, solidified by their military discipline, which had led to very good Ordeal ratings.

Powerless, they had to endure helplessly, the contact of dirty hands seeping under their clothes, palpating and groping their bodies as if they were picking fruit. When one of the men tried to tear off her top, Esya uttered a scream of terror.

But as their fate seemed fixed, a deafening buzz interrupted their moment of debauchery. Showing their experience, the warriors, violating their dignity, immediately rose to their feet and drew their swords, their erection very apparent under their trousers.

A second later, shrill cackles were heard, accompanied by multiple rustle in the tall grass. The visibility was poor and the atmosphere oppressive. Their lustfulness had completely disappeared.

At last, a strange squeak resembling a whale call under helium resounded near them, which made them all turn around in the direction of the noise. It was then that a huge brownish, vaguely translucent mass crawled out of the tall grass. The Slug.

A moment later, cries of terror and misery filled the air, mixed with the shrill cackling of the Digestors and the metallic hissing of swords splitting air and flesh.