

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 186 - Crunch the Savior

Once the battle was over, Jake suddenly felt overwhelmed by a terrible fatigue. He'd been fighting most of the night with two badly punctured knees, thinking he wouldn't survive. Even for a strong-willed, battle-hardened person, it was still a grueling experience both physically and emotionally.

It took a few extra minutes before the tremors and residual energy from the battle between these titans dissipated. Rocks and dust had obscured their vision, while the temperature due to the repeated impacts and shock waves had risen severely.

When the dust had almost settled and their visibility had returned to normal, the Tiger, who had been of little use, gave a long roar to signal them to come back. Jake wasn't sure if he and the other four humans were allowed to follow them, but he felt he could shamelessly use his cat's notoriety in this pack, regardless of its value.

Sarah and Kyle, stronger than the two princesses, woke up at this point, allowing Jake to lighten his burden. The two companions were disoriented and their gaze only alternated between the enormous remains of the Digestor and the two massive felines that had already begun to gorge themselves on their victim.

With each snap of the jaws, several dozen kilos of silvery meat disappeared into the mouths of the Lion and Tiger, the chitin

exoskeleton, bones and metal legs being bitten indiscriminately, like a scrap car that has been run through a crusher.

Jake was dying to empty his gourds to fill them with the blood of the Rank 7 Digestor, but he was afraid that the two felines would take his gesture as disrespectful. The dominant lions were known to eat first, followed by the other lions or dominant lioness, eventually ending with the cubs.

For the moment, Jake didn't know if this motley pack was following this principle, or how much the Lion had evolved cognitively to free himself from his animal instincts. If he took Jake's deliberate action as a provocation, Jake would have no choice but to confront him.

It was clear that the Lion did not perceive them as prey, as evidenced by Crunch's smug expression and the fact that this gang of felines had saved them in extremis. In comparison, no other human had come to rescue them.

Before taking any unnecessary risks, Jake decided to communicate with his cat by probing his thoughts in order to get a sense of the situation. He already had his own idea, but a quick confirmation was better than long, fruitless ramblings.

Now that his Extrasensory Perception had exceeded 100 pts, it was indeed possible for him to control and perceive the Aether on a ten meters radius. This greatly simplified communication with his cat, since he could now access the data from his bracelet and the Blue Aether circulating in his brain with a single thought.

Crunch didn't have much more Aether than before, except for the few Digestors he had killed with Jake, Sarah and Will a few hours earlier. He had indeed stayed quietly inside the Oracle Shelter waiting for them.

Since Jake's Intelligence had exceeded 150 pts of Aether, his ability to interpret his cat's thoughts and emotions by linking his mind to them had also evolved significantly. After trial and error in interpreting his cat's thoughts, he finally obtained a satisfactory summary of the facts, which confirmed his hypothesis.

Just as Jake had been given a mission to save the two princesses, Crunch had been given a mission to save him as well. Naturally, Crunch couldn't save Jake on his own, and his Oracle Path had logically led him to call upon his feline friends, whose the Lion and Tiger were unfathomable.

In the end, it worked perfectly and everyone was saved without a hitch. AS for the reason for these missions, it was what the Coaching feature called opportunities for the bracelet holder.

Both princesses were in distress and Jake needed some empty crystals. They had plenty of them and weren't too far away. Jake was up to the task and their moral inclination was in line with his own value model. AS a result, a Mission Coach had been generated.

There were certainly other factors influencing the Oracle System's decisions, but he didn't have access to them with his current Oracle Rank. Yerode and Lamine were the two free electrons that affected the mission given by the Oracle, but the Oracle was supposed to protect their free will.

This meant that these missions linked to opportunities obeyed a number of rules and algorithms that the Oracle System could not deviate from, not to mention the fact that the Oracle System was not infallible when Digestors entered the equation. The only doubt Jake had was whether the relevance of these missions depended on his own Oracle Rank or not.

In the second case, it meant that this mission had been generated with the attempted assassination of Yerode and Lamine in mind, which he thought highly unlikely. But if that was the case, it meant that the mission generated for Crunch was just a logical chain reaction planned by the Oracle System to maximize the chances of success of its initial mission.

Jake didn't think for a second that the Oracle System would be so benevolent as to put his existence and that of the two young women above the murderous intentions of the other two mercenaries. The plan of the two assassins was nearly perfect and had only failed because of the unexpected arrival of a horde of Digestors they knew nothing about.

The Oracle System knew that a horde was chasing them and was not as foggy as they were. However, the Oracle could only use their senses or the invisible bracelets worn by certain trees and plants to track the movements of these monsters. Knowing their number, their position, the types of Digestors and their exact strategy was beyond its reach.

In other words, it was impossible that the Oracle tried to derail Yerode and Lamine's mission by giving them an inadequate plan. The plan to kill Jake was optimal, but only in relation to the knowledge and information available to the Oracle System.

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After being briefed by Crunch, the other felines had been given the rescue mission in turn, and this coincided with the Lion's desire to hunt a prey to his liking. So they all agreed without hesitation,

which led to their arrival with fanfare and the killing of the Pterosaur Digestor.

Jake mechanically stroked his cat's fur to congratulate his performance and fuel his silly ego. As long as the cat didn't ask him for Aether, Jake was ready to give him as many càrèsses and kibbles as he wanted.

Nevertheless, Jake still needed him to convince the lion to communicate with him. The Lion had no vocal cords, but his intelligence was definitely superior to Crunch's.

If Jake compared Crunch to a Digestor, his strength was somewhere between a Rank 2 and 3. The Lion, by effortlessly pulverizing a Rank 7, had shown that he wasn't playing in the same category. The Butterfly, clearly intelligent, had chosen to flee without hesitation, which was a first for Jake. Until now, the Digestors had always sacrificed themselves on his blade without any inconsistency or uncertainty.

The Silver Butterfly was so fast that he could go from 0 km/h to Mach 5 in less than a second and yet he still chose to flee. Just for that alone, Jake would never risk underestimating such a big feline.

While Crunch was trying to convince the Lion, who was surprisingly indifferent to the cat's meowing during his meal, the two unconscious princesses woke up in their turn.

They too were disoriented, but the tears of joy flowing from Esya's eyes made it clear that they couldn't believe they were still alive. It had been by far the longest and most eventful night of their lives.

A few minutes later, Crunch came back to them waddling with his insufferable còcky face. Sarah took the bait and willingly gave him

the petting he was waiting for, which gave the two noblewomen the green light to do the same.