

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 222 - The Family Meeting

Recognizing Anya, two young women in their twenties and another man, who was none other than her cousin Charles, stood up to kiss each other on the cheek. The man was no longer ashamed to flaunt his huge facial scar and even seemed to wear it with pride.

Charles paused hesitantly when he saw Jake's gold-silver eyes, but he relaxed when he realized it was just his cousin. He let out a small embarrassed laugh before shaking his hand in a falsely formal manner.

He then introduced himself to the rest of the group by shaking hands, and he complimented or joked with each of them. A real icebreaker.

'Let me do the introductions. 'Charles proposed by taking the initiative. He knew Jake couldn't stand either of his cousins and Anya could only get along with the two young women who came to greet her.

'From left to right, Vincent, Noémie, Kate, Cédric, George, Brice, Edouard, Arthur, Aurelie and Elijah. In the middle chair is Antoine, our grandfather and the current head of the family. '

Jake glanced indifferently at each of his cousins during the introductions before fixing his gaze on his grandfather's. Despite his apparent indifference, he was shocked inside. Several of his cousins were missing from the meeting, and those who were present had changed a lot.

Noemie and Kate were the two young women who greeted Anya. They were about 160 centimeters tall with a rather slender figure and modest breasts. They had the same green eyes and dark brown hair that Anya and Jake had before the assimilation of his bloodline.

In essence, they hadn't changed much from his last memory, but their demeanor was more reserved and they had given up makeup and perfume. They were also a little thinner and wore a switchblade on their belts.

Just as Charles had changed after being disfigured on B842, most of his cousins seemed more mature and were taking this meeting seriously. There were a few, however, who reeked of smugness and arrogance to the point of upsetting Sarah.

Vincent had, just like Anya and Charles, already participated in his second Ordeal. He held the official family record and made no secret of it, as evidenced by his falsely complacent superiority.

He was a man who had made a career in VR sports, although he had never been approached by the government to join their 'Trial Worlds' prodigy program. With his pale blue skin, blood-red irises and pointed ears, he had clearly assimilated a strange bloodline, which no doubt explained part of his arrogance.

Kevin, George and Brice were the three demons that had made his childhood miserable. They were all gifted, excelling in everything, with the rare quality of being extremely proactive and dedicated to what they did, no matter how hard the task.

His aunts and uncles had always made him understand how much he should emulate these three cousins, and did not hesitate to scold his cousin Anya when she defended him. Even his grandfather, who was rather benevolent, had never made any secret of his favoritism.

He was a man who swore only by meritocracy. He rewarded effort and talent and ignored the lazy with no gift. He himself had arrived at his position with iron discipline without anyone forcing him to do so.

Hu vft ruaovuz ovu nfoaurhu rmz ovu emmtrull md vufzo om epatu f zuiphofro ezfrtlmr iacu Jfcu. Hft ao rmo guur dmz ovu dfho ovfo vu vft imlo val nfzurol fo f suzw wmpre feu, val ezfrtdfovuz jmpit nzmfgiw vfsu npralvut vaq nuzlmrfiiw.

Kevin, who used to be Jake's size, was now over 230 centimeters tall, with protruding muscles stretching the fabric of his shirt. He used to be a trader and now looked like a strongman competitor. His hair was as thick as a bear's hair, and he had the hair of a gorilla. The leather armchair was distorted by his weight. Another bloodline obtained from a rather hairy species.

George was about 180 centimeters tall as before, but no longer wore glasses. His fingers were webbed and his skin was covered with movable scales capable of refracting light. Observing him was extremely unpleasant. Jake didn't know what he was doing before the arrival of the Oracle's spaceship, but he had done some analyst studies.

Lastly, Brice was a self-employed businessman who had started his own start-up a few years earlier. His company had created a phone game that had worked pretty well. Like Cédric and George, he was about Jake's age and his appearance had changed considerably.

He wore a special forces uniform and had a long claymore on his hip. His face was the same as before but he had a mysterious aura that blurred his presence. Jake had to make a conscious effort to stare at him for more than a second.

Edward, Arthur and Aurelie were older cousins, in their early thirties, with whom he had interacted very little in the past and had a

relatively neutral opinion of them. As for Elijah, he was technically one of his uncles and was approaching forty. None of them had bloodlines and their clothing was rather stilted. He didn't know anything about their lives and didn't care.

While Jake was scrutinizing his grandfather, his own group introduced itself and Sarah's presence allowed them to be warmly welcomed by his male cousins. Kyle winked at Noemie and Kate, who seemed more approachable, but they ignored him completely.

Clap, clap!

The old man, who was their grandfather, clapped his hands again to get their attention. He had moderately enjoyed being ignored the first time. Anya, and the rest of Jake's group rushed to choose an empty seat, except for Jake, who stood staring at his grandfather in a rude manner.

Only then did his cousins realize how much he had changed in a few months. Although Jake was ignoring them thoroughly, none of them felt comfortable remembering how much they had hurt him in the past.

Od hmpzlu, rmo usuzwmru tat. Tvmlu jvm vft mgofarut ovuaz mjr gimmtiaru frt zujfztl loaii vft ovu lfqu taltfar dmz vaq, gpo ao jfl loaii zuflpzare om luu ovfo vu jfl rm imreuz pluiull. Adouz fii, ovuw juzu lpnmlut om hmiifgmzfou tpzare ovu ruko Oztufi.

Coming out of his torpor, Jake realized he was the only one still standing and nonchalantly used his new telekinetic skill to bring a chair under his butt.

The demonstration of power produced the desired effect, with the mouths of Charles, Noemie and Kate forming a big O of astonishment. Cédric and Brice frowned, while the others managed to keep their

masks of indifference. Nevertheless, the message had gotten through. He was no longer the same person, easily bullied and humiliated.

His grandfather's eyes widened slightly before finally returning to their previous relaxed state. Adopting a paternal smile, the old man finally spoke.

'First of all, I'm glad to see you all alive.' He began by scanning his descendants with his eyes and ended with Jake.

His relief was heartfelt. Without them, there was no future for the family.

'I've brought you together today because I want you to work together during your next Ordeal. I know that some of you are opposed to it, or have formed your own group or faction, but let me reveal a few things to you before you make your decision.'

Their grandfather paused for a moment of silence, giving a warning look to Brice and his son Elijah, who grunted in response.

'First of all, no, you can't hide your score from this Ordeal. That's true for all participants, whether you like it or not. I will, and the Earth Government will have access to that information. You'll find out why soon enough.'

Anya and Vincent nodded to show that they shared the same opinion.

'However, you are free to keep to yourself what your rewards, your rating or the course of the Ordeal itself will be. In the end, that's what really matters.'

'If they don't have access to our Ordeal rating, what score are we talking about?' Tim asked timidly in a reedy voice, while raising his hand. His other hand held a half-eaten cookie.

‘The survival time.’ Vincent spat, bulging his chest.

‘How can that be possible?’ Edward politely protested as he put down his cup of tea. ‘If I remember correctly, no matter how long an Ordeal lasts, you only stay in the Red Cube for 24 hours.’

Several of his cousins felt the same way, Jake included.

‘That is indeed the case.’ Their grandfather concurred. ‘But in this Ordeal, there is a way, which unfortunately I cannot reveal until you have completed your second Ordeal.’

‘To get back to the heart of the matter, here are the key pieces of information you need to consider before you decide whether or not to collaborate. Firstly, this Ordeal is pretty much the same for everyone. Second, you cannot fail. By this I mean that participating guarantees you will earn at least 100 credits.’

‘Thirdly... 99% of participants are eliminated in the first five minutes. 0.8% of the remaining 1% are eliminated in the first half hour. Out of several million participants, only a few dozen survive to the end. For your information, I was eliminated after a month and 26 days, so I have no idea what these survivors faced afterwards.’