

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 249 - Battle Royale

While Jake was still snuggled comfortably underground, the artificial voice proceeded to announce its verdict on his performance during this second trial.

[Congratulations Jake Wilderth for being the 7216th contestant to survive a night on the island in just 17 days, 0 hours 13 minutes and 48 seconds.]

[50,000 points for passing the second trial. 0 bonus points for not being among the top 5000.]

As he pulled himself out of the ground, Jake continued to pay attention in the hope that some potential exploits would be announced, but he soon gave up. If it was true that he had defeated a T-Rex, the only night he had actually accomplished a massacre was the night of his third attempt.

In other words, on his last attempt he had simply snatched the green stone from its owner, then shamelessly fled underground and literally holed up without taking any risks until the next morning. Seen in this way, his performance during this second trial could only be considered mediocre, even if at this point in the Ordeal what really mattered was to still be in the running.

Considering the time he had wasted during his first trial in the ocean, and the fact that he was the 7216th participant to successfully spend

a night on the island, it didn't take a genius to deduce that there were less than 10,000 participants still alive in this Sanctuary Bubble.

After all, he was the 10,127th participant to reach the shore a few days earlier, and considering that he was one of the last, if not the last to make it, it was clear that the number of players had plummeted drastically during those few days.

That didn't mean that three thousand Players had given up. Apart from the lucky few who had the ability to precisely target the flaws of the first event, most of them had had to start over many times or were already extremely strong. It was virtually impossible for these participants to give up after a few successive failures.

The logical conclusion was that out of these three thousand participants, a good number were simply still stuck in the second trial, unable to solve the mystery. Considering the hardships that a man like Jake had faced before finding a solution, it was easy to imagine what the average Player had to endure.

Jake also realized that this artificial voice seemed to only take into account the feats he had accomplished during his last attempt, the one that ended in success. This explained why some extraordinary feats during his first trial had not been rewarded.

Hu vft ar qart, dmz ukfqniu, ovu dfho ovfo vu vft ljpq ar ovu mhuf
tunovl mz dmpevo fii cartl md lozfreu hzufopzul ar tuun jfouz ovfo
ruaovuz ovu smahu rmz ovu Ozfhiu Swlouq vft frmrprhut.

Indeed, if he had touched the ocean floor several times and even discovered the enormous indestructible ore covering the seabed, the truth was that each time his snorkeling had been nothing more than a one-way trip. He had never gotten enough air to come back up to the surface. It was therefore normal that the achievement was never credited to him.

Jake did not think that these feats were useless, however, since reaching the ocean floor was a feat in itself and it was impossible for the Sanctuary Bubble to ignore it. He only hoped that it would be the same with this second trial, even though his performance was comparatively much more trivial.

While he was wondering about the course of the future events, the artificial voice cut short his reflexion.

[The third stage will begin shortly, in 5,4,3,2,1,0.]

When the countdown reached 0, a strange sensation ran through his body. It was the same kind of feeling that one might get when a plane accelerated steeply during takeoff or when an elevator started to operate a little abruptly.

He felt his body being inexplicably compressed, but his internal organs also yo-yoed as if he had just been shaken around like a maracas. Yet he hadn't moved and the ground under his feet hadn't changed either.

Still, when he concentrated again on his surroundings his eyes bulged uncontrollably. The landscape around him may have been identical in almost every way to the one a few seconds earlier, but he instinctively knew on a gut level that the situation had changed.

His body, the grass under his feet, the warmth of the sun, the smells, even the saturation of colors! Everything felt real now! Until then he hadn't realized it, as if his mind had been in a kind of lucid dream from the start. Even though he knew that everything was fake, he was unable to pinpoint why. But now that he was 'awake,' it was more than simple to point out all the discrepancies.

At that very moment, Jake was overwhelmed by an indisputable certainty: It was no longer a simulation and he was now on a real

island identical in almost every way to the one he had just left. He couldn't be sure, but he was absolutely positive that if he were to die here, his second Ordeal would come to an end.

Nm jmrtuz ovu Sfrhopfzw Bpggiu vft zudplut om sfiatfou val luhmrt ozafi ar ovu nzusampl foouqno. Id vu vft zufiiw guur luro om oval alifrt jaov val zufi gmtw, ao jmpit vfsu guur iacu hmqqaooare lpahatu dmz rm zuflmr easur val hzaoahfi jufcurut hmrtaoamr gfhc ovur.

As if to confirm his suppositions, the artificial voice resounded again and began to introduce the peculiarities of the third trial. The tone was remarkably courteous.

[First, congratulations to Jake Wilderth for successfully completing the first two trials. The first two trials were part of a simulation to prepare you for the third trial].

[The first trial introduced you to the ocean fauna around the island, while developing your survival skills in a hostile environment and forging your willpower. Anyone who persisted definitely strengthened their Soul and Spirit Body significantly and resolved the psychological trauma and phobias typically observed in such situations. If you have not overcome the fear of death, you have definitively overcome the fear of suffering and if not, at least you know how to disregard it or use it to your advantage].

[The purpose of the second trial was to introduce you to the dangers of the island, but above all to give you time to understand by yourself how to survive there. There are many places in the Mirror Universe or beyond that are even more mysterious and hostile, and it was imperative that as young Players you became aware of them. If this happens to you in the future, you won't have this simulation to prepare for it and we hope that this invaluable experience will serve as a memorable lesson for you].

[These two preliminary trials of the simulation thus bring us to the objective of the third trial which marks the beginning of the second phase: The Battle Royale].

[The objective of the third trial is as follows: To survive on the island until the descent of the Phantom Sanctuary and to enter it. The Phantom Sanctuary will only accept 100 participants.]

Jake was shocked silly for a brief moment. Knowing that there were more than 11 million participants at the start and that there were currently only 7000 still in the running, 100 places were a ridiculously low number. It was clear that the Sanctuary Bubble wanted them to kill each other.

[The functions of the Sanctuary Bubble that were previously deactivated or hidden will now be turned on:]

[The Feats Feature, the Player Rankings, as well as the Exploration feature are now enabled.]

Wvur ovu fzoadahafi smahu poouzut ovulu jmztl, Jfcu, jvm jfl fizuftw fjfzu md ovu Fufol hfouemzw, lptturiw talhmsuzut ovfo ojm qmzu dufopzul vft bplo guur fttut. Ir fttaoamr, ovu hfouemzw hmzzulnmrtare om val dufol rmj talnifwut qphv qmzu ardmzqfoamr frt vu hmpit rmj tazuhoiw fhull f ialo md fii ovu dufol jfaoare om gu fhmqnialvut mr ovu alifrt frt ovu zujfztl uknuhout pnmr ovuaz hmqniuamr.

The same was true for the Exploration feature, which contained many achievements, such as exploring the seabed for example, but also many sub-missions similar to Quests. The island was gigantic and seemed to hold an infinite number of secrets.

As for the Player Rankings, this was the most important aspect of this third event. In addition to showing how many points each Player had

scored and their respective names and species, it also showed which competitor was still in the running and which was already dead.

Another important detail was the number of murders that each Player had committed, and since Jake's murder count was still zero, it was clear that the murders were not related to the killing of animals.

There was still the possibility that the counter had been reset at the beginning of this third event, but in view of the low scores and the nature of this third trial, it was more prudent to treat each participant as an enemy.

As he was about to look at the Rankings in more detail, the artificial voice spoke one last time before finally shutting up for good.

[Good luck, may fate work in your favor!]

Jake remained sceptical about this last announcement, but he soon regained his poise. It was similar to the encouragement formula used by the Oracle System at the beginning of each Ordeal.

He had noticed that after passing the first two tests, the artificial voice had ceased to be robotic and indifferent and now seemed to show him a form of respect, as if getting this far was enough to prove that he was different from the rest of the herd.

It was with this encouragement that Jake embarked on this new challenge. And while he was peacefully familiarizing himself with the specifics of the event, elsewhere on the island many participants were fighting for their lives.