

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 252 - Back to the Ocean

Despite the doubts that ran through his mind, Jake drove the disabled young woman from his mind. If fate wished for them to meet in this Ordeal, it would happen naturally if they both survived until the next ordeal.

For the moment, the priority was to find his companions and think about his survival strategy on this island. Surviving on the island until the descent of the Phantom Sanctuary was not the only tricky problem to solve. In addition to the fact that the number of places inside the Sanctuary would be limited, it was also necessary to determine where the Sanctuary in Question would appear.

The description of the third trial spoke of a 'descent', which suggested that the Phantom Sanctuary would descend from the sky like a spaceship, but this could very well be a metaphor. This vessel or building could either descend from the sky, or rise from the bottom of the ocean or the earth.

By instinct, Jake was tempted to go towards the center of the island. The high plateaus and the snow-capped mountain range disappearing in the clouds was a seemingly ideal place, but it could also be a decoy leading to a waste of precious time.

The feats to be accomplished in the Feat or Exploration category were not just limited to massacring or cataloguing the local fauna and flora. There were construction challenges, standard exploration challenges such as climbing the highest mountain on the island, but also all kinds of missions that encouraged them to discover the secrets that the island abounded with.

There were several archaeology and adventure challenges to discover the ruins and abandoned monuments on the island, but also much more daring challenges, such as finding the place on the island that produced the crystals inserted in the foreheads of certain animals like the feathered T-Rex that Jake had defeated on several occasions.

The mystery of the Soul Stones was also part of it, and according to the interface of the Sanctuary Bubble, Jake was far from having solved the mystery completely. However, none of this mattered at the moment.

What made Jake wary right now was the fact that the Oracle System seemed to be back up and running. The Shadow Guide, who wouldn't appear during the simulation trials, was once again behaving the way he expected him to.

With a thought, he could determine in which direction Tim, the two sisters, Will and Sarah stood, and if this could be good news in some ways, it also posed major issues.

As strong as Jake had become, he wasn't confident in his ability to take on the Players at the top of the rankings. The number 1 didn't seem to be especially aggressive towards the other participants, but it was clear that many of the top contenders were actively trying to reduce the number of Players on the island, whether it was to steal their points or reduce the competition.

Jake had focused on long-term growth and currently had no way to escape the Shadow Guides of other players. Any player with an Oracle Rank equal to or higher than his would be able to locate him and conspire against him. Conversely, he had no way to ambush or detect these Players.

After his misadventure with Yerode and Lamine, Jake had become particularly suspicious of this type of scenario and unfortunately there was no ideal countermeasure other than increasing his Oracle Rank or making sure he was stronger than these potential enemies.

To some extent, this could also be an advantage he could take advantage of. By default, these Player Killers would tend to underestimate him because his Oracle Rank was lower than theirs. The problem was that most of the time, the Oracle Rank was usually justified. All Evolvers with an Oracle Rank 6 or higher at their Second Ordeal could not be weak.

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For example, if each participant tried to kill 100,000 sharks to complete the corresponding Diamond ‘Shark Hunter’ feat, there was a good chance that there would not be enough sharks on the island for everyone. This was not only because the size of the island was limited, but rather because the ocean was not. The marine fauna could very well flee to the open sea and keep its distance until the Ordeal was over.

On the island itself, the problem was even worse. The land animals had nowhere to flee to.

The last aspect that Jake had to take into account, and which he hadn’t been able to verify yet, was that the simulations during the first two trials had probably been calibrated for each Player. If Tim had had to face megalodons or mosasaurs like the ones he had encountered, it would have been impossible for the kid to reach the shore before he did. Because these megalodons were not only physically impressive, their Aether stats were also pretty high.

The creatures on the island or in the water could thus prove to be weaker than the ones he was used to, but could also turn out to be much more dangerous since the strongest Players also had to face an Ordeal worthy of them.

There was good news in all this, though, and it had to do with the fact that Jake was now on the island with his real body. This had a weighty consequence: His physical stats and Aetheric could now grow normally and it was very likely that the defeated monsters would yield some Aether from now on.

It was for this reason that Jake felt it was unwise to seek out his friends at this time. If they were so eager to find him, they would come to him on their own. If they were eliminated along the way, it could not be blamed on him anyway. After all, the Ordeal was, in essence, individual.

Thus, it was only logical that Jake headed to the beach where he had first berthed. He knew the sea creatures by heart, unlike those on the island where he was still relatively ignorant and the ocean had proven to be a safer place, since at least he could survive the night without dying inexplicably. The Flintium and Orxanium didn't seem to have any effect away from the shore.

It was still early and luckily Jake didn't encounter any aggressive creatures on his way. By this time the creatures were either in a weakened physical and mental state or were in a deep sleep. With the exception of the humanoid giant, Jake had not encountered anything really threatening during the day.

However, this did not mean that the island was safe, and as a precaution, Jake made his way back by travelling underground. About twenty minutes later, he had returned to the beach, but the pterodactyl corpse was no longer there, which was consistent with the fact that this was only a simulation previously.

'What do you think of this plan, Xi?' Jake asked seriously as he contemplated the swirling of the waves.

'Excellent choice.' The hologram of Xi nodded at his side, her immaterial legs flashing through the water. Her beauty was as mesmerizing as ever. 'With the two Soul Glyphs you've got, your speed through the water is decent and

small predators will be intimidated by your approach, allowing you to focus on the larger prey. Although completing all of the Diamond hunting feats may not be possible, the Platinum feats should be attainable.'

'Most importantly, I'll be able to put my Myrtharian Bloodline to good use. 'Jake added with a confident smile. 'For the first time, it will feel like a grinding session in a video game. As long as these monsters prove to be a challenge, I'll be able to progress swiftly. Once I'm strong enough, I'll be able to start hunting the creatures on the island and take care of the other Feats and Quests.'

With his confidence and ambition rekindled, Jake didn't fall into arrogance this time. Before entering the water, he made himself a new machete using his Earth and Heat Control Skills and inserted the Green Soul Stone into its handle.

He then re-spent the 500 Aether points needed to inject as much Grey Aether as possible into his new weapon. The amount previously spent had obviously been refunded when he had died during his previous attempt.

Armed with his new weapon, Jake marched with a conquering step towards the ocean, and then dived headfirst when a wave a little higher than the others tried to swallow him up. The effect of the Soul Glyph was immediately activated and a slight shimmer appeared on his skin, drastically improving his hydrodynamics.

A moment later, Jake was splitting the waves at a speed close to 50 kilometers per hour. It wasn't much compared to the marine predators lurking around the island, but it was more than enough to do what he had to do.

A few minutes later, he came across a school of rather familiar giant jellyfish and a new genocide began, on the real island this time. But as Jake grew stronger, second after second, his companions and cousins were also

following the flow of their own adventure. Sadly, not everyone was destined to be a winner.