

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 258 – The Untrustworthy Shadow Guide

Since Jake's arrival on the real island and the beginning of his third trial, only a few hours had really passed and it was still only past noon. The sun was at its zenith and without his tanned skin, he would have been facing the risk of dangerous sunstrokes.

The temperatures on the island in the middle of the day were indeed scorching and very few animals were willing to leave the jungle with milder temperatures. Besides the influence of the three mysterious minerals affecting the mind in different ways at night, the Quietness of the fauna during the day could also be attributed to this unbearable heat.

For the time being, Jake had nothing to fear. He was surely one of the few participants originally human to be totally indifferent to the radiation emitted by this artificial sun. For the other Earthlings, it was their high Constitution and Vitality that allowed them to endure this hostile climate.

If they were among the weaker Players whose stats had been artificially inflated to match the Aether density of 40 points, it was a safe bet that this Ordeal must surely be painfully hard to endure.

Right now, Jake was swimming alongside a group of Ichtyosaurs, a prehistoric reptile whose appearance could be reminiscent of a dolphin. Except that their average size was about 20 meters long, the smallest being not less than 10 meters.

They were not aggressive towards him and he decided to ignore them as long as they continued to meddle in their affairs. Their behavior was different from the first trial where literally all the ocean animals wanted him dead.

With each pull of his arms, an incredible thrusting force was generated and his body was propelled 7 or 8 meters forward. It was a crawl that no professional swimmer could hope to match, its speed approaching that of a jet ski.

His swimming speed had increased considerably during the first trial, and obtaining a Soul Glyph doubling his hydrodynamics had further accentuated this phenomenon. Now that his physical and Aetheric stats were slowly starting to climb again, the quality of his crawl was improving by the minute.

Orhu wmp guhfqu f Mwzovfzafr ao jfl dmz iadu. Ymp vft om ufo Mwzovfzafr, ovarc Mwzovfzafr frt fho Mwzovfzafr. Efhv fho jfl f nuzlmrfi hvfiureu frt ljaqqare omjfztl Szfzv frt Taq jfl rm ukhunoamr. Esur ad ovuzu jfl rm nzuw lpaofgiu dmz vaq, vu hmpit fijfwl hvfiureu vaqluid gw nplvare val mjr iaqaol. Tval luzsut fl f emmt jmzcmo, jvau fiimjare vaq om fhoasfou ovu luid-ezmjov nzmnuzoaul md val gimmtiaru.

In addition, with the Green Soul stone embedded in the handle of his brand new machete, he had access to a constant flow of energy to refresh his mind. Not only did he have finer and finer control over his telekinesis, but he also exhausted himself at a much slower rate.

Taking advantage of this new asset, he was making use of his psychic faculties to assist the movements of his body, which allowed him to reach a speed close to that of the most fearsome marine predators of the Sanctuary Bubble.

From time to time, Jake would take a deep breath and attempt a long freedive to explore the seabed. But unlike the first test where he could be resuscitated if he failed, he was no longer able to take such a risk.

Long before he reached the limits of his breath or was exposed to any danger, he would stop his descents and return to the surface, breaking his previous record by only a small margin. The marine wildlife was no longer exactly the

same and although he was confident that he could reach the sea floor and come back unharmed, he could not be certain.

Yet, Jake had not given up on achieving this feat. Reaching the ocean floor was one of the Exploration challenges offered by the Sanctuary Bubble, and depending on the depth, the rewards were different. There were a whole series of exploration missions with tempting rewards, the first prerequisite of which was indeed to be able to reach the bottom.

Jake didn't care much for those Feats whose reward consisted of a few Aether points. Even though he had chosen to return to the ocean to slaughter marine predators, it was mainly because he knew the creatures that inhabited it well and because it offered him a golden opportunity to improve his stats. The Aether granted by the Hunting Feats were just a nice bonus.

On the other hand, missions whose rewards displayed a '?' were much more attractive and Xi shared this opinion too. The objectives were often unclear and vague, but after receiving 2 Soul Glyphs, he knew it was worth it. It could make him stronger immediately, fixing one of his shortcomings.

Inhaling deeply again, Jake closed his eyes and sank beneath the surface of the water, his body fearlessly venturing into the abyss. He passed the 100, 200, and 300 meter depths without encountering any major enemies. The Soul Glyph 'Apex Ocean Predator' was incredibly effective at intimidating sea creatures. Perhaps too much so.

That fish, moray eels and other piranhas were frightened was not a surprise, but that even most sharks, crocodiles and other sea monsters would choose decisively to escape clearly compromised the effectiveness of his hunt.

Ao iuflo vu hmpit qmsu fzmprt jaovmpo guare vartuzut gw frwovare. Bpo ovu nifar ozpov jfl ovfo Jfcu jfl vmnare om lopqgiu pnmr f zufi gftll om oulo val iaqaol. Hu jfl hmrsarhut ovfo ovuzu qplo gu fii cartl md

fgmQarfoamrl fo ovu gmoomQ md oval mhuf, gpo tulnaou val gulo uddmzol
vu vft rusuz hmQu fhzmll ovuQ.

Even on Earth, there were many legends about the existence of such monsters and some scars found on sperm whales would suggest that there were squids of gigantic proportions in the abyss. It was nonetheless unverifiable, and nowadays it was simply part of the folklore.

However, after having confronted mosasaurs and megalodons, Jake was much more inclined to believe in their existence.

All of a sudden, his Spirit Body deployed more than 20 meters around him sent him an unexpected feedback. His field of Extrasensory Perception had just been touched by something, and the little that he had detected suggested that it was a colossal Aether mass.

'What was that?' Jake momentarily stopped swimming to probe the darkness around him.

The water at this depth was dense and still, and the slightest movement would induce currents that were extremely simple to detect with his present senses. Holding his breath, he waited a few seconds in the hope that the monster would reappear, but the water around him remained static and his Spirit Body did not detect any activity. Paradoxically, his Shadow Guide was already recommending him to return.

'Too bad, I guess it's not my lucky day...'

He was about to begin his ascent to the surface, when his body started to jerk in all directions, as if he had just been hit by some violent underwater waves. Before he had time to react, a gigantic Aether mass entered his field of perception again, and when he saw the thing behind this Aetheric signature, he almost died of a heart attack.

‘Damn it! What the fućk is that thing?!’ Jake screamed out, letting a flood of bubbles out of his mouth.

BOOOM!

Tvu lmpřt md f vpeu giflo jfl vufzt lusuzfi vprztut Quouzl guimj ovu lpzdfhu frt f gimmt-hmsuzut Jfcu lvmo ovzmpcv ovu lpzdfhu iacu f zmhcuo f duj luhmrtl ifouz. Hal gzufov jfl jvuuxare frt val čvèlo vft hfsut ar lusuzfi huroaQuouzl fl ad val zag hfeu vft bplo guur lqflvut gw f ifzeu vfqquz.

His sternum was fractured into several pieces as well as most of his ribs, but his machete had held firm. Without his machete, he probably would have been killed instantly.

ROAAARR!

Muffled by the hundreds of meters of water between them, the roar of the monster still rippled through his eardrums as the murky water on the surface began to undulate eerily.

Knowing that he was not out of the woods, Jake unhesitatingly abandoned his previous plan. With his life at stake, he followed the advice of his Shadow Guide faithfully and activated his telekinesis to fly away.

For a minute, he flew as fast as he could towards the shore, quickly exhausting his mental forces before dropping back a few miles away when he was certain that the sea monster had given up chasing him. From the beginning to the end of the interaction, he had never had a clear picture of the creature, but he was sure of one thing. Against such a monster, he was as insignificant as a flea.

The Aether levels of this thing were higher than his and he had only felt such pressure twice. The time he had met Myrmid at the end of his first Ordeal and during the fight between the Lion and the Rank 7 Digestor.

The most shocking thing was that his Shadow Guide had reacted a little late. If the Shadow Guide was working properly, in order to protect him from danger his course would have circumvented the monster. Instead, he had gone straight for him.

Such a monstrosity was far beyond what he expected to face during this Ordeal and it called into question his entire strategy. No wonder that the rewards of these exploration missions were rewarded with ‘?’. Because the Oracle itself had no idea of the risks involved.
