

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 273 - Bitter Victory

Like Kevin earlier, Jake and Sarah slipped off the cracked wall leaving a trail of blood in their wake. As Jake collapsed to the ground, he was so dizzy he had to bite his tongue to maintain consciousness. Sarah by his side had not yet come to her senses.

Standing up with difficulty, he ran his hand behind his head and felt a warm, sticky liquid soak through his hair. This alien really got him good this time.

But luckily, his bones were not to be taken lightly either. Back then during his First Ordeal he had already broken through stone walls quite a few times and with his new Myrtharian body it wasn't enough to put him in danger. Nevertheless, it was still extremely painful.

Jake could not help but congratulate himself on the good work he had done in erecting these walls. Although the wall behind him was cracked and split as if it had just been hit by a catapult shot, the structure had held up well.

Just for that alone, he did not regret wasting all that time stacking stones. More than a meter and a half thick, they had built them in anticipation of such a situation.

Of course, this was no time to indulge in self-gratification. The Nosk in front of them had had the decency not to exploit their vulnerable moment, but that did not mean that they were out of the woods yet. On the contrary, Jake could read a certain elation in the monster's gestures, a clear sign that it felt great joy to observe their discomfiture.

But all of a sudden, the alien did something that shocked him deeply. The humanoid monster slowly lifted its steel helmet with the effigy of a creature from another world, revealing a hideous face with withered and blackened skin. Only its eyes were electric blue, but they were devoid of white, which paradoxically made it even more frightening.

Its shapeless maw filled with sharp teeth stretched painfully several times without making the slightest sound, as if the alien was practicing its articulation before declaring with a rasp that would have given nightmares to the children,

‘You...are...weak. Cheap... tricks.’

The muscles in Jake’s face twitched as he listened to these words, which were as unnerving to hear as a car at minus 30 degrees Celsius failing to start, but he felt a different emotion as well. Seconds earlier, he thought the alien was taunting them, but that tired, old voice wasn’t as dashing as he imagined.

Far from mocking, what Jake felt in the tone of the Nosk was a sense of frustration and some kind of resentment. Despite this, the creature’s fighting spirit had not diminished and it was clear that the alien had no intention of retreating or negotiating. The Spirit Body of this enemy was very stable and with his current expertise, Jake could read the unwavering resolution in the Aether ripples of this opponent.

More importantly, this Nosk had spoken in English. It had been a laborious attempt, but it just goes to show how smart this alien was. It was not a ferocious beast that was all brawn but no brains. It was possible that the alien was smarter than he was, but fortunately it did not seem capable of using its prodigious mental abilities offensively.

Dpzare ovu gzaud qmquro jvur Jfcu frt ovu fiaur juzu lofzare fo ufhv movuz iacu qft tmel, Szfzv darfiw qfrfeut om zuhmsuz. Huz uknzullamr jfl vfeefzt frt lvu jfl lofeeuzare liaevoiw, gpo vuz Mwzqatafr Tzfrlu lcaii jfl cuunare vuz ar fr fiuzo lofou.

As for Kevin, he had been the first one knocked out and was much stronger than the young woman. He was already awake when Jake and Sarah had crashed into the wall, but he hadn't found the courage to carry on fighting. The brief exchange with the Nosk had shaken him deeply.

Regardless, Jake had not said his last word. As soon as he had slammed into the wall, Jake had known that a frontal confrontation against this alien would be a lost cause. Once serious, the Nosk could deploy colossal power through its dendrites and each of them could act independently. It was like facing thousands of arms at once, each of them capable of spitting out blasts of energy that the enemy had not yet used.

Even though Jake and Sarah came out of that first round on the losing side, the humanoid monster was still badly wounded and it had allowed them to confirm that their weapons were working. It was the opposite for Kevin, whose keratin claws had broken cleanly after a few blows.

As stingy as Jake might normally be about his money or Aether, it was nothing compared to his own life. That was why he had directly sacrificed 50,000 Aether points to pump Grey Aether into all the nearby needles under his control.

Most of them had broken off or their tips had blunted on impact against the alien's armor and body, but once reinforced with that much Sharpening Aether it no longer mattered.

In just a few seconds, Jake had transformed a hundred useless needles into a piercing ammunition capable of penetrating the skin and armor of a Nosk effortlessly. Although the alien in front had not moved, he had not missed anything of the sneaky tactics of this human. That was the reason why he had accused him of using cheap tricks.

'Any last words?' Jake asked indifferently, calmly picking up his machete without taking his eyes off the enemy. Sarah had also rearmed.

‘I... should... be... the... one... asking... this... question. ‘Nosk answered coldly.

At that very moment, the alien’s resolute aura changed again and a fanatical killing intent exploded from the monster’s body. A psychic wave enveloped the entire stone house and beyond and an intense headache clouded the vision of all of them. Tim, Lily and the bear cub who had been left out of the scene lost consciousness on the spot.

Kusar frt Sfzfv vuit mr, gpo gimmt jfl lnpzoare dzmQ ovu lusur mzadahul ar ovuaz dfhul. Oriw Jfcu jfl fgiu om zulalo ovu Qurofi foofhc, fo ovu hmlo md f rmlugiut.

Horried, he realized that it was very similar to the psychic attack of the Brain Eater that was devouring the brain of the hero Myrmid back then. Much less devastating of course... At least he wasn’t completely helpless in the face of it.

To his utter helplessness, he may have inherited a soul and a Spirit Body superior to others thanks to his Myrtharian bloodline, but he was a perfect neophyte in this field. Even with his present Intelligence, there was a limit to what he could improvise.

As he inspected the condition of his comrades at a glance, he felt his chest tightening. Tim and Lily’s unconscious face was starting to turn dangerously cyanotic, and their rolling eyes suggested that they were already oscillating between life and death. The condition of the little koala bear and Lu Yan was unknown, but he didn’t care.

Mercifully, this mental blast did not last. As soon as the alien’s aura had changed, Jake had counterattacked with all his might by throwing all his needles at the Nosk. The alien warrior had persisted for a mere second, only to be forced to focus his full attention on these projectiles if he wished to survive.

The killing intent vanished as if it had never existed, but instead something much worse replaced it. As sharp as these needles were, they were too thin to slice through these thick intertwined dendrites, but piercing them through and through was wonderfully simple.

Soon, as a result of being pierced repeatedly, electric arcs began to flash out of these holes, and the energy usually contained in these miraculous dendrites began to leak out. Jake watched the scene in horror and the Nosk seemed to know how it would end. Instead of retreating and fleeing, he ran towards the culprit with the momentum of a rhino.

The stone wall that had been holding up shattered and Jake was thrown from the hillside with the Nosk bumping into him. Both man and alien fell more than twenty meters and rolled another fifty meters or so before coming to rest against the enormous trunk of an extraterrestrial sequoia.

While trying to get up, Jake gasped in agony when a sharp pain twisted his senses. He almost fainted on the spot. Every bone in his chest had been reduced to mush and the condition of his organs underneath looked like red meat after being put in a blender.

A mouthful of blood rose to his mouth and for the second time in his life he vomited something other than food. But when Jake saw the alien struggling nearby, he knew he couldn't complain yet.

Clenching his blood-red fangs, he threw himself on the Nosk on the ground and began to ravage it with his fists in the same fashion as his cousin before him. His shining fists and claws smashed and sliced through every dendrite and part of the creature's body unharmed and for a brief reprieve he almost forgot his pain.

But instead of dying neatly and silently, the dying Nosk cast a sad gaze on him.

‘If... only... there... was... not... this... cold.’ The alien grunted, breathing in with difficulty.

‘Hmmm?’ Jake halted his raised fist, which stirred up all his pain.

Scanning the Nosk’s body with his Spirit Body, Jake understood the words of this formidable enemy with dread. From the beginning, the alien was in no condition to fight. It was unable to resist the lure of a good battle and had appeared invincible earlier, but all of its joints were hampered and frozen as if its body was incapable of producing its own heat. The warrior’s body was icy to the touch, and its nerves only partially responded.

Before Jake could dwell on this truth, the alien breathed its last. The energy leaking from its dendrites lost the semblance of cohesion that kept them under control and the alien’s body began to glow like a sun during a supernova.

Knowing what was about to happen, Jake crawled away to the verge of unconsciousness, and then levitated up with his last ounce of strength to the clearing where the stone house was hidden.

Seconds later when he peeked behind him, a blinding flash impressed his retinas, followed by a thunderous BOOM. The Nosk was truly dead now.
