

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 279 - Ancient Civilization

‘I, I don’t want to alarm you, but given the number of footprints this creature is not alone...’ Lu Yan stammered, stating the obvious with a worried face.

This time Jake ignored her whining, too busy thinking about the implications of such a presence around the volcano. To his knowledge, there was only one volcano on the island, but he had only explored about a third of it.

Over the past two weeks, their group had accomplished quite a few exploration feats, including the discovery of several archaeological sites with rudimentary burial chambers as well as archaic ruins of ancient cities, but they had not been able to extract any useful information from these discoveries.

Whether the tombs, alien bones, and remains of utensils and buildings they had found, they were in such a dilapidated state that these finds were at least several thousand years old, perhaps even millions of years old. In fact, the few intact bones and artifacts were much more recent than the local ruins and according to Jake they were probably participants like him from previous Ordeals.

The builders of these ancient cities were nowhere to be found, even the graves were empty, but according to their past observations this island had surely been the seat of an advanced civilization. The few relatively intact ruins they had found were not made of rock, granite, marble or wood, nor were they decorated or covered with precious metals such as gold and silver or primitive alloys such as bronze.

Everything pointed towards the fact that the former inhabitants of this island had a more advanced technology than that of the Earth, but even such a civilization had not survived the test of time. Jake didn't know what may have caused their extinction, but based on the synopsis of the Second Ordeal, he had a good idea of what people they were.

According to the initial information, the asteroid where this Ordeal took place had been an ancient outpost belonging to the Zhorion race. If the System A0 housed the oldest planets in the Mirror Universe, this people must have been quite impressive at its peak.

Unfortunately, none of these ruins gave any indication of their appearance or culture, and he had almost forgotten that the descendants of the Zhorions were supposed to have found refuge in the Sanctuary Bubble where they were.

Cmpit ao gu ovfo ovulu vprqfrmat hzufopzul juzu ar dfho Zvmzamrl ? Adouz fii, ovuw juzu ovu mriw arouiiaeuro iadu dmzq mr ovu alifrt vu vft urhmprouzut lm dfz. Esur ad ovu mru vu vft urhmprouzut jfl dzmq f laqpifoamr, ovu dfho ovfo ao vft guur fgiu om hzfdo mz nzmhpzu f nurfro artahfout ovfo aol arouiiaeurhu vft lpznflut ovfo md fr fraqfi.

Although he had spent several weeks on the island, Jake still hadn't managed to mine a single Green Soul Stone. Either the Naequat ores were too small, mixing with the soil and plants of the island, or the latter were huge monolithic blocks like the one covering the ocean floor or those buried under the safe haven clearings. Green Soul Stones of exploitable size seemed extremely rare and as rough as its Soul Stone could be there were signs of being cut by an unknown tool.

'Should I take the risk of going back up this trail?'

Jake was seriously tempted, but he gave up on the idea. He hadn't come here for that and he was unable to trade a single blow against what he thought was a 20-meter tall Zhorion anyway.

' Too bad I didn't scan it with my bracelet last time. That would have answered my doubts... '.

Jake didn't start spending his Aether more generously until the third trial. Before that, he considered that he could just die and start over again indefinitely and would only spend his Aether when he felt he had no choice or when he could not find any other solution.

With the beginning of the third trial, his outlook had changed, as his death would become final and would mean the failure of his Second Ordeal. He had also gained a significant amount of Aether and had come to accept the idea that the Aether in his bracelet existed only to be spent.

Since then, he had squandered an astronomical amount of Aether over the past few weeks, scanning every animal, plant and material he encountered, allowing him to gain an almost encyclopedic knowledge of most of the elements that made up the island's ecosystem. In any case, they had had no choice, since the feats of Herbalists, Biologist, Cartographer and Geologist required a complete identification of the relevant components. Memorizing the appearance of a plant or animal was not enough, it was also necessary to know their properties and characteristics.

Unless a considerable amount of time was wasted personally testing each plant and material on the island to become familiar with their characteristics, scanning them was the best solution. The information provided by the scan was limited, but it was considered as a pass by the counter of these Exploration Feats.

Jake initially thought that these feats would be fairly easy, but by not receiving any notification indicating that the chains of feats to be unlocked had reached their final stage, he had begun to hold high expectations for the final reward. It would be neat if it could be another Soul Glyph. After receiving the first two, he was craving for more.

Having decided to stick to his original plan, Jake barked a ‘Let’s go. ‘in a sullen tone, and then he started climbing the volcano again, leaving behind him a dubious Lu Yan.

They could have reached the summit in a few minutes, but after finding these footprints, Jake had slowed down the pace so as not to miss any of them. Luckily, he seemed to have worried for nothing. After the previous footsteps, the duo encountered no hiccups and arrived safely at the edge of the crater at the top of the volcano.

The volcano was not so high, a little more than a thousand meters, but its crater was worthy of respect, spanning over 5 kilometers. The mountain being active, Jake was ready to disappear underground with Lu Yan at the slightest sign of eruption.

Carefully, with Lu Yan sweating profusely behind him and coughing regularly from the smoke, Jake leaned over the crater to see if his plan was feasible. A volcanic chamber filled with a sea of lava greeted his sight, a warmth comparable to the hot air escaping from an oven ventilating his face.

‘I, Jake, I know you hate me, but I can’t follow you inside. ‘Lu Yan stuttered again before finally declaring in a firm and resolute tone. What’s the point of playing coy or frightened if in the end she was forced to commit suicide in a sea of lava.

Jake frowned when he heard her complaint, but when he saw her reddened skin and sweat-soaked clothes moulding the curves of her body, he had to face the facts. She couldn’t follow him where he was going.

Nevertheless, he did not trust her enough to leave her alone either, it was indisputable. Over the past two weeks, Lu Yan had also accumulated quite a bit of Aether and had largely regained the Aether that Jake had stolen from her. She had even, as Jake had demanded, given half of her earnings to Lily.

To be honest, collecting Aether by cooperating with Jake and his companions had been much easier than when she was traveling with her brother.

It hurt her heart to lose all her hard-earned Aether to a stupid, immature kid, but she knew it was either that or die. If Lu Yifeng had been there, that idiot would surely have given his Aether instead, but he was not. It was the first time she had to fend for herself without him.

‘Same deal as the previous one. ‘Jake finally made up his mind as he raised his index finger in the air and revealed a row of fangs.‘I’ll give you a chance to go about your business, but if I find out that you conspired against me or the rest of the group I’ll kill you immediately and not just in this Ordeal. If you have any common sense, you know that my Oracle Rank will surpass yours after this Ordeal, no matter what you try. That means I’ll be able to locate you with a single thought once you’re on B842. ‘

He had thought of forcing her to sign a slave contract, but it was not in his nature and he knew that the young woman was too proud for that or she would not have reached the third trial. The only thing that might compel her to accept was if he threatened to kill her brother for real, but again it was not in his nature to commit such despicable acts.

‘I promise I will behave myself. ‘Lu Yan promised with a submissive smile devoid of malice. Inside, however, she was seething with rage at this seemingly endless chronic humiliation.

‘Hmm,‘ Jake nodded before leaning over the crater rim again as if he wanted to check something.

As she thought he was about to jump, he turned around and gave a final instruction.

‘Go back to the foot of the volcano where we entered and inform me if any Players or the owners of those footprints come back. Make sure you don’t go too far away from this place so that I can find you easily.‘

‘All right...

Following these words, Jake made a match jump into the volcanic chamber and for a brief moment the young woman thought he had slipped and committed suicide. Leaning in turn close to the rim, she discovered that he had actually found support against the inner surface of the crater and began to scale down the volcano, slowly moving closer to the sea of lava below.