

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 282 - Lu Yan's Style

Jake was dying to explore these underground galleries on his own, but he gave up this futile *désiré*. He would have plenty of time to explore the hidden side of the volcano after checking out his companions' circumstances. Moreover, such an endeavour required some preparation, not to mention the fact that he was relatively dehydrated after his three-day nap.

Slightly dazzled by the bright sun shining high above him, Jake believed he had nothing to fear from these seemingly humanoid monsters for the time being. If reality was not too different from the simulation, these creatures were vulnerable to sunlight. During the day, he had virtually nothing to fear, so it made sense that they would mostly move underground, shielded from any sunlight.

This did not prevent him from levitating to the bottom of the volcano as quietly as he could. He even took the opportunity to erase the traces of their previous passage, including their footprints at the top of the mountain. He lost a few minutes making a round trip, but it was only after this action that he was able to relax.

He didn't know if these monsters were aware of their presence, but unless they had specifically checked the top of the volcano, it was unlikely. As long as they were unaware of his presence, he could go back to the volcanic chamber without any worry. He had also not forgotten to close the entrance of his artificial cave to avoid the slightest suspicion.

Under the guidance of his Shadow Guide, Jake disappeared underground as soon as he reached the reassuring edge of the jungle. It wasn't that he didn't

want to do the same when he climbed down the volcano, but unfortunately it was mostly rock. Moving underground would have been too laborious.

He did notice, however, that while his Aether stats had not increased at all during the last three days due to his blackout, his control of Earth and Heat had improved slightly. This method of cultivation seemed to have a beneficial effect on the Kintharian part of his bloodline.

After a few minutes of traveling underground, Jake clenched his fists in irritation when he realized that Lu Yan had strayed far from the area where they were supposed to meet. If she thought she could betray them so easily, she was far too naive.

Champing at the bit, Jake sped up noticeably to catch up with her, but moments later he realized that he had overreacted. His prejudices towards the young Chinese woman were turning him paranoid, but he would rather do that than get knifed in the back without figuring out why.

Sweeping the area with his Spirit Body, he realized that Lu Yan was standing right above him and from her Aether flow, she was seriously injured.

‘What happened?’ Jake asked rudely as he stepped out of the ground.

Lu Yan was having trouble breathing, her back was wedged against a tree and her legs were tucked up against her chest. When she saw his head sticking out of the ground, she almost had a heart attack. His low, deep voice was already fuelling her most recent nightmares, and seeing him in this context had terrified her to the core.

Suuare ovfo ovu wmpre jmqfr vft hvmlur om gu ypauo frt lommt
Qmoamriull frt hzmphvut ar lnaou md vuz arbpzaul, vu hmpit rmo vuin gpo
lhmji jaov taltfar.

‘You don’t answer me?’ Jake scolded in a threatening tone, staring her straight in the eyes?

But contrary to what he had imagined, the disturbed young woman pounced on him like a hare flushed out and pressed her pale little hand against his mouth to prevent him from speaking.

‘Shush! Shut up or you’ll get us both killed!’ Lu Yan whispered, making the shush sign with her mouth and her free hand.

Jake was dying to grab the hand on his mouth and crush her five fingers, but he refrained from doing so, recognizing all the clinical signs of genuine fear. The young woman seemed more expressive in his presence since her true nature had come to light, but the fear and deference she displayed in his presence was usually feigned.

Jake raised his eyebrows instead, but instead of listening to her, he expanded his Spirit Body to its maximum range. When he arrived, he had already scanned the place with his senses and hadn’t noticed anything. Besides, with the exception of a few Players, monsters and possibly those mysterious Zhorions, Jake didn’t fear much on that island. On land, he was confident that he could easily escape from any foe.

Paying close attention to his perception feedback, he found no life forms nearby except for some small Orxan-like insects, reptiles and birds, most of which were immersed in their usual lethargic naps at this time of day.

These creatures were venomous, with blood whose blue blood cells were loaded with Orxanium. Their venom and their fluids in general were soporific and hallucinogenic, but as long as he didn’t bother them he didn’t have much to fear during the day. It was at night that the hells were unleashed on the island.

Grabbing Lu Yan’s wrist, he unscrupulously pushed her hand aside, preventing him from speaking, and then took the opportunity to dust himself off. His leather armor and the Grey Aether-reinforced plates covering it had withstood the high temperatures of the volcanic chamber, but his growth

spurt made him feel cramped inside. This was also one of the reasons why he wanted to return to his base camp.

‘There’s nobody here but us. ‘Jake calmly said when he saw that the young woman still hadn’t cooled down and was about to flee with her poorly healed wounds.

At the sight of his composure and serene tone, Lu Yan’s face fluctuated briefly, but she visibly relaxed after that. With a groan of pain unworthy of a lady, she let herself slide down again against the tree that was previously supporting her.

Jake was then able to observe the young woman’s wounds in more detail. The only reason she was still alive was because of the armor he had crafted for her. The Chest plate forged from molten rock and reinforced with Aether was slightly cracked, but this had saved her from an otherwise deadly impact.

Regrettably, her Chest underneath had not fared as well. With the swelling due to inflammation and internal bleeding her Chest size had gained two cups, but in this particular context it was anything but a source of rejoicing. Her sternum had caved in like Jake’s a few weeks earlier and she had quite a few broken ribs.

It was amazing that she had survived this long, but her injuries were not as severe as Jake’s. At least her lungs hadn’t suffered too much. It was the pressure that was keeping her from breathing properly. She also had some scratch-like lacerations, but these were on the mend.

‘What happened? ‘Jake repeated again, now that the young woman had restored her typical poise.

Too busy controlling her telekinesis and her Aether of Vitality and Constitution to speed her healing, the young woman barely heard him. Nevertheless, she forced herself to respond succinctly between grunts of pain.

‘Not participants... They were monsters from the island, but different... Sort of monkeys about my size with long claws and a red crystal inserted in their foreheads. Instead of being in a Berserk state like the other red-blooded Flint type animals, they had an excellent sense of cooperation and they chased me away tirelessly ignoring all the other dinosaurs on their way. I was only able to lose them by leading them to another participant walking around... ‘

Jake’s face twitched when he heard the strategy used to shake off the monsters. Sacrificing an innocent Player to ensure her own survival was definitely her style. He had no doubt that she would do the same with him if it was the only way to escape death. Except that she could be sure that in such a situation, he would not hesitate to do the same with her.

Indeed, finding another participant nearby was not difficult. All one had to do was wish it and an Oracle Path would immediately be calculated to show the way. As such, it was a last resort solution that he could also count on if he was overwhelmed by an enemy tide. After all, there were only 100 tickets in the Phantom Sanctuary of the fourth trial.