

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 285 - The Ominous Presence

‘ Sigh... Anyway, it was dark and the jungle was treacherous. Aurelie got her foot stuck in a root and a spinosaurus devoured her in one bite. Arthur lost his temper and tried to avenge her. It turned out that she hadn’t stumbled accidentally. The root was an Orxan rattlesnake and he in turn was bitten in the leg. Another monster devoured him shortly afterwards.’

Jake and Lu Yan found it hard to believe that participants who had survived to the third trial could make such basic mistakes, but apparently that was indeed the case. Nevertheless, they could not help but think that something was wrong.

‘We spent the rest of the night running away until morning. With the sunrise, those monsters left us alone and we were finally able to catch our breath. We reached your base last night, but those same monsters had followed us. Thanks to all the traps, Kevin and Sarah managed to repel them. Unfortunately, most of Kevin’s minions died to protect us.’

‘Kevin’s minions?’ Jake turned to his cousin with a questioning arched eyebrow. His intense gaze literally meant, ‘What are you waiting for to explain this?’

However, his cousin was almost as thick-skinned as him. Running his nose with total relaxation, he shrugged his shoulders with a small laugh.

‘ Nothing to feel sorry for. After you left, I decided to see if my Werebear bloodline worked on the local species. It turned out it did. By challenging a few weakened hyenas and bears at dawn, I managed to subdue them. They

are mentally connected to me and I can share their thoughts. The footprints around the hill are simply my betas patrolling around the camp.'

'How many did you have and how many do you have left?' Jake inquired to estimate the magnitude of last night's confrontation.

'I had tamed 33 of them. I only have 4 left. Some of them seem to have been ripped out of my control by a foreign entity.'

Considering that Kevin and Sarah had participated in the fight personally, it was a relatively large monster attack. Jake was having a hard time understanding what could have brought so many different species together to pursue his uncle and two of his cousins relentlessly.

Thinking about his own discovery and the attack that Lu Yan had also recently suffered, he unhesitatingly raised the question that was burning his lips.

'Did those monsters have a red crystal embedded in their foreheads?'

This time it was Sarah who answered, knowing exactly what he was referring to.

'Not just red, but blue as well. I'm also sure I saw a green crystal in the dark.'
'She explained concisely in a grave voice.'

At that moment, not only Jake, but Lu Yan also had trouble believing it was a coincidence. As a precaution, Jake checked the Player Ranking with some foreboding, and when he saw the current ranking, an expression of horror could not help but warp his traits.

Wvur vu vft lofzout val rfn ar ovu smihfrah hvfQguz ovzUU tfwl ufziauz, ovuzu juzu loaii Qmzu mz iull 2000 nfzoahanfrol ar hmrouroamr. Wvur vu jmcu pn, ovu rpQguz vft tzmnnut guimj 1900, gpo rmovare fifzQare. Hmjusuz, guojuur val zupramr jaov Lp Yfr frt val zuopzr om ovu gflu, ovu rpQguz md Pifwuzl vft tzmnnut guimj 1700.

It was crucial to remember that the most reckless and incompetent participants had long since been eliminated. At this point, only seasoned, overly meticulous and tough-minded Players were left.

‘Take a look at the Player Ranking. There’s something going on.’ Jake croaked solemnly.

Following his word, all opened the Player Ranking page and soon after a horrified expression crept onto their faces too. At that point, no one still thought it was a coincidence. Even the two Ziwids seemed nervous.

‘It’s going to happen again.’ Elijah sighed prophetically.

‘Of course it’s going to happen again Sherlock! The real question is, what do we do to prepare for it?’ Kate snorted without showing any respect for her older uncle.

‘There’s not much we can do about it.’ Jake cut the debate short with a flashy hand gesture. ‘It’s been 45 days since the Second Ordeal began. We don’t know when the Phantom Sanctuary will appear, but it’s normal for the ordeal to become more difficult as time passes. No matter what happens, our score is already guaranteed to be in the top 0.0001% of the participants. We can only do our best at this point.’

‘True.’ Noémie, who had remained silent until now, showed her assent. No matter what the Ordeal had in store for them, they just had to face whatever the Sanctuary Bubble would throw to their faces.

‘We could also rejoin other participants, couldn’t we?’ Tim timidly suggested with a raised hand.

His other hand tightly clasped Lily’s hand. Clearly, his seduction skills were superior to Kevin’s, who was still blueballed after all his attempts.

‘To get stabbed in the back by a Krish or a Nosk? No way!’ Sarah shook her head with pursed lips.

You only had to look at the Player Ranking to see that the aliens of these two species were wannabe psychopaths. These two species were responsible for 90% of the kills between players. Trying to cooperate with these aliens was a whim almost tantamount to committing suicide. It just amounted to choosing another executioner.

Lu Yan, who avoided sticking her oar in Jake's presence, re-centered the discussion on the attack that Elijah and his two cousins had suffered to his utter surprise.

'Did you also feel a presence while you were running away? As if no matter what you were doing or hiding, something or someone was watching you and there was nothing you could do about it.'

'Now that you mention it...'

Even Kevin, who hadn't paid as much heed to details since he got his Werebear bloodline, started scratching his beard with a pensive face before looking back suddenly.

'If I tell you that I didn't sleep a wink all night because I felt like I was being watched, would you believe it?' His hairy cousin grumbled as he inspected the space behind him, but apart from the wall there was nothing special to observe.'

'You too?!' Sarah exclaimed with a shocked expression. 'I thought I was the only one.'

It turned out that everyone without exception except Jake and the Ziuids had felt this presence. Tim, who could sense the danger from quite a distance, was even more receptive to this kind of thing and couldn't close his eyes without having horrible nightmares.

'Do you have nightmares too?' Jake asked the others with a puzzled face.

'No, I don't...'

'I couldn't sleep, so no... '

'I do! 'It was Lily who raised her hand.

Basically, either they were not sleeping or they managed to fall asleep and a nightmare ensued, waking them up immediately. In addition to the injuries sustained during the attacks, this could explain the dark circles and pale face of his uncle and his two cousins. According to Kevin and Sarah, this ubiquitous feeling had only kicked in after last night's attacks ended.

' Should I stay here ?' Jake pondered inwardly with genuine frustration.

Originally, he didn't plan to stay here. He still had a volcano to explore and a training session to complete. Unfortunately, it was clear that the group was facing a major threat without him. However, it was also true that he could not give up his own training and adventures. Stagnation in this Ordeal was like walking backwards.

In the end, Jake decided to tell them about his own experience under the volcano and his theory about the Zhorion descendants and the fact that they could be responsible for the attacks. No one was really shocked by this revelation, believing that it was much more logical for these wild creatures to be under someone's control.

The fact that the presence observing them was untraceable meant that the culprit(s) could make themselves invisible or had an unstoppable means of evading their sight. Jake had the highest Extrasensory Perception and the most developed Spirit Body in the group, followed by Lu Yan and Sarah.

Lu Yan's Aether stats were capped at 100 points, but her Spirit Body was stronger than normal thanks to the Eltarian part of her bloodline, which she had obtained in a way he was not yet sure about.

Well, Sarah also had the Self-Encoding Skill and her Aether stats were actually very close to Jake's. Since she had never specifically sought to form an Aether Core, her mental stats were lower, but still close to 150 points.

Jfcu vft rmo tuouhout frw vattur nzulurhu prtuzempmt jvur vu fzzasut, gpo val zfreu jfl iaqaout om fgmpo 20-30 quouzl. A iaooiu qmzu ad vu jfl dmhplare val hmrlhamplrull ar f lnuhadah tazuhomr. Nusuzovuiull, mru vft om hmrlatuz ovu nmlagaiaow ovfo ovuw vft f jfw om ulhfnu val lurlul. Ir oval hflu, ovulu fiaurl hmpit suzw juui loftr f duj quouzl guimj vaq jaovmpo vaq rmoahare.

As for the rest of the group, their Aether stats were maxed out and their Spirit Body had reached level 2 or 3 after the first trial, but their abilities were clearly a notch below.

Kevin was the most limited in terms of supernatural perception. He had a very compact Spirit Body with a beastly aura, but hardly extensible. This meant that the range of his Extrasensory Perception was even more reduced compared to that of a normal human, but he compensated with an increased Perception of his physical senses. His sense of smell, hearing and sight was better than Jake's, even taking into account his Myrtharian body.

Concluding that it was too risky to leave his companions alone for too long, Jake decided to temporarily put his initial plan on hold. At the very least, he would make sure to be back at the base before nightfall.