

# The Oracle Paths

## Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

### Chapter 292 – We're Screwed

A silence lingered between them after the young woman's story, each of them immersed in their own reflections. Jake had come to save them, but it was now clear to him that he had virtually no chance of defeating this alien by brute force. The big question was whether he would be able to remain conscious in the face of a soul attack from this creature.

When she fainted in the air, Lu Yan had only regained consciousness at the last moment, a few meters before hitting the ground. The hillside where their base was concealed was more than fifty meters high and stood on a small cliff forcing them to make a slight detour when climbing.

Considering the height of the fall and the time it took for the body to gain speed, it was not difficult to estimate that she had passed out for at least three seconds. On that basis, Jake thought he was capable of withstanding such a mental attack, but it was on the premise that this alien had used its full power. Given how it had squashed them like bugs, it was rather unlikely.

Restless, Jake advanced to the edge of the jungle to peer at the volcano where the watchful diplodocus was standing guard. Even with the sun rising, the dinosaur hadn't yet shown the slightest sign of the tiredness expected from the end of its berserk state.

Seeing the giant monster turning its long neck in all directions so as not to miss any details, Jake's face darkened. Lu Yan was standing quietly behind him, but by hearing her gnashing her teeth he could tell that she was trying to keep her legs from running away.

‘Jake... I don’t think this is a good idea.’ She suggested in a tone as courteous and docile as she could. ‘Even if we don’t save them, their score for this Ordeal should be outstanding. We have no reason to risk our lives for them. We can always compensate them afterwards.’

The words had been let out! She had said her piece. If Jake thought once again that she was just a manipulative and selfish bitch, so be it!

As expected, Jake gave her a stern glare when he heard her proposal, but contrary to what she feared, he didn’t punish her.

‘You’re right. Saving them is too risky.’ Jake admitted after a while with a concerned wrinkle on his forehead.

‘In that case, what do we do?’ Lu Yan asked, holding back a deep sigh of relief. She had been afraid that he would act irrationally in this situation.

‘Well, we go in all the same.’

‘...’

At that precise moment, the brief relief that had pervaded Lu Yan and relaxed her face faded away, replaced by outright despair. She could not understand why he was so anxious to save them. She could understand if death was final in this Ordeal, but it was not. She knew that with his abilities, she would never have taken such a risk.

Sensing what was going through her head, Jake immediately corrected her,

‘Don’t get me wrong. Saving them is one of the objectives, but even if they had not been captured I would have come here on my own. I have a quest that requires me to explore the secret passage leading to the underground galleries beneath the volcano.’

‘Oh...’

So that was the reason? For a moment she had believed that her nemesis had changed completely, becoming almost a person of chivalrous virtues with a strong sense of brotherhood and sacrifice. She was almost relieved to learn that she was wrong.

However, if there was indeed such a quest, it changed everything. Lu Yan's fear and doubts were quickly overshadowed by a surge of greed and it was enough to give her the courage she previously didn't think she had.

If she was alone, she would never have set foot on that volcano, but with Jake it was different. If Jake was able to complete the quest directly, simply traveling with him would guarantee her the same exploration rewards.

'When do we go?' Lu Yan inquired with an enthusiastic pitch so genuine that for a second Jake thought that the alien's mental attack had burned out all her brain cells.

Hmjusuz, jvur vu zuquqguzut jvm vu jfl tufiare jaov, vu jfl rmo lm hmrplut frwqmzu. Opo md ezuut frt fqgaoamr, ovu wmpre jmQfr vft ofcur ovu zalc md loufiare val Auovuz tpzare ovu CmialupQ Bfooiu md ovu Fazlo Oztufi. Tval nzmsut ovfo tulnaou vuz fnnfzuro hfiQ frt arouiiaeurhu, ovu wmpre jmQfr vft f rflow difj. Art ovfo difj jfl ovu arfgaiaow om hmrozmi vuzluid jvur lpgbuhout om f lozmre duuiare md fsfzahu!

A flawed psychopath!

Well, Jake hadn't yet decided if she was a real psychopath or just a selfish, cold bitch, but it was clear that she had a screw loose.

'Not right away. We'll go when I'm cured and when this diplodocus has gone into lethargy.' He finally replied after seriously considering all the possibilities.

Because of this dinosaur, Jake couldn't even go back to training in the volcanic chamber. If he went through the air, there was a definite risk that he

would be spotted. Going to the other side of the volcano was not a solution either. Since Lu Yan had arrived before him, she had enough time to go around the volcano and this dinosaur was by no means the only one.

The most likely scenario was that there was not just one secret entrance, but several. The number of dinosaurs standing guard was small, but their sheer size and strength made their combined defense almost impenetrable to the average Player.

Healing was not the issue in this case. Jake and Lu Yan found a relatively isolated corner and cut down the surrounding trees to create a sunny space. Otherwise, the dense foliage of these tropical trees obstructed most of the rays.

It was rather cold and Jake lamented that the sun above them was weakly shining as if it was already late afternoon, but he was content with that. As long as he had good soil and enough heat or radiation, he could heal the worst wounds in no time.

‘Go get some wood and keep the fire going until I’m back on the surface.’  
‘Jake calmly commanded the young woman who was watching his little game without really understanding what he was trying to do.

Knowing that challenging him would only bring her trouble, Lu Yan complied without further ado and returned a few minutes later with enough logs and twigs to fuel an inferno for several days. A machete sharpened with Grey Aether combined with telekinesis was the perfect logger kit.

She had never seen Jake bury himself in the ground for anything other than moving or fighting and that’s why she was quite puzzled when Jake asked her to look after the fire. With his powers, Jake lit the camp fire with a snap of his finger and buried himself directly under the flames.

If he could, he would have even jumped directly into the fire, but the soil covering him would have extinguished the flames. After his coma under the

volcano his body could tolerate prolonged contact against weak, warm-colored flames as long as he did not expose himself directly to the central flames from which the combustion started.

In the first case, the temperature was only a few hundred degrees Celsius while in the second case the core flames could exceed 1400 C°. There were other factors affecting the temperature or color of a flame, but there was nothing to worry about in a conventional wood combustion.

Once underground, he closed his eyes and as usual he focused on absorbing the heat and nutrients from the soil around him to speed up his healing. His body was also slightly tempered by the process, but compared to his training under the volcano it was laughable.

About two hours later, Jake emerged from his earthen grave, his torso being licked directly by the flames' edge of the campfire without showing any sign of pain. Lu Yan wondered what Jake was doing underneath, but seeing the veins on his skin glowing like lava rivers, her curiosity was satisfied.

He was now completely healed. Alas, what should have restored his confidence for the upcoming operation was immediately dampened with a disturbing discovery: It was dark again.

'No, it can't be. It shouldn't even be noon... Did I sleep so long?' Jake wondered with a certain disbelief on his face.

But when he received the time confirmation from his bracelet he had to face the facts. Actually, by looking more closely at the sky, Jake noticed that the sun had not disappeared, but its light was now barely brighter than a standard full moon.

'What the fućk is happening here?'

[ You have another, more urgent problem ] Xi declared by making pop up several previous scan reports in his mind.

Reviewing the characteristics of the humanoid monsters and the recent increase in night attacks on players, as well as the increased activity of the island's beasts at night, a terrible foreboding overtook him.

'We're screwed...'