

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 294 - Underground Maze

Once the diplodocus died, Jake quickly removed the red crystal inserted in its forehead. According to Lu Yan and the others, another creature had always hurried to retrieve it before they could retrieve one. Therefore, he wanted to make sure that there wasn't a difference or an important detail that he may have missed from the one analyzed during his second trial.

Spending the Aether point required for the scan, Jake checked the crystal analysis report line by line, but he soon shook his head in disappointment. The information provided was identical. In other words, apart from serving as a vessel for the dinosaur's soul, he still didn't know much more.

Nevertheless, if the spirit of these creatures and the program governing their behavior was contained in these crystals, it was logical that the owner would seek to recover them in case of death. By inserting the crystal into another body, he could easily create new minions, although Jake was not sure if it was that simple.

'So?' Lu Yan asked carefully beside him.

'Nothing special. We have to move on before one of his buddies notices its condition.'

'Okay...'

There were indeed other dinosaurs roaming on the different slopes of the volcano. Even if these monsters moved little and tended to camp in the area assigned to them, they were not safe from having their fight been seen by someone else.

Losing interest in the crystal and the colossal corpse in front of him, Jake used his physical strength, earth control and telekinesis combined to move the rock blocking the entrance to the secret passage. Even with his psychic abilities he had to repeat the process several times to manage to open enough space for him and Lu Yan to pass through.

They could have taken the lift concealed on the ground, but they had found no way to activate it. Similarly, they had difficulty understanding how these aliens normally managed to move the rock covering the secret passage.

Unless their physical and psychic strength was far superior to his, he could not see how such a people could enter and leave so easily through this passage. Though, with a diplodocus like the one he had just fought, pushing the rock should be child's play.

There must have been a lever or something like that hidden nearby, but they didn't have time for that. Having managed to access the secret passage in another way, Jake wasted no more time and entered the underground gallery without further ado.

Just after walking a few meters inside the tunnel, he realized that it was going to be a real chore to travel in there. There were no torches, lamps or candles inside this wide corridor carved into the volcano. They were in complete darkness.

'I have a bad feeling about this, Jake. We'd better get out of here before this ends badly.' Lu Yan commented with a tone between frustration and regret.

'You can run away whenever you want, but don't count on me to help you when it's your turn to be chased by these aliens.' Jake replied curtly. 'Now, shut up! We're not alone here.'

After only a few hundred meters, they heard grunting noises not far from them, and seconds later, six reddish glows belonging to three distinct creatures appeared in front of them at an intersection.

Before the three monsters had even had time to sniff their presence, Jake had already decapitated two of them. Lu Yan had also reacted promptly and even though her telekinesis did not work properly on these monsters, just like Jake she knew how to use a sword. They hadn't taken gladiator training for nothing.

Seconds later, silence was back in the dark tunnel and a metallic smell lingered in the air. The duo resumed their march, but this time they took extra care to watch their gait to minimize the noise of their footsteps.

For Jake it was simple. Floating like a ghost a few centimeters above the ground, he would glide along the surface of the ground, scanning the corridor in front of him several times a second with psychic impulses. As for Lu Yan, she did the same, but had to lay her feet on the ground briefly from time to time to relieve her budding headache.

The gallery network turned out to be much more tortuous and winding than they had originally imagined, and they hit dead ends several times. On other occasions, they crossed the entire volcano and ended up on the other side of it, sometimes on the mountainside, sometimes directly in the jungle.

This was a real problem for Jake, because he could confirm through his Shadow Guide that Sarah and the others were under the volcano, but no matter how much they explored these galleries, they could not find any passage to go deeper down to reach them.

Yet, as time went by, his bracelet did its job, as did his memory. The Mapping function was mapping more and more of this underground network and by elimination they were getting closer and closer to their goal.

As the scope of options narrowed, Jake and Lu Yan began to take the right paths more and more often, and the presence of creatures standing guard grew more intense. At first there were only two or three monsters, but now it was

usually seven or eight. Each time they managed to eliminate them before one of them could escape, but it was getting harder and harder.

‘Jake, if you keep going in that direction, you’re going to commit suicide.

‘Lu Yan complained telepathically for the 9th consecutive time since they entered the underground maze.

They had just survived an encounter against a pack of rabid guard dogs and for the first time, the young woman had been injured. Blood was dripping from her right forearm after a violent bite, and without the armor Jake had made for her, she could have lost her arm.

Jake didn’t care about Lu Yan’s grievances, but he had to admit that it looked bad if the enemy patrols in these tunnels continued to increase. It should be remembered that they had not yet encountered a single humanoid monster, let alone one of the so-called Zhorions.

But after staring at the ground for a long time as if trying to see through it, Jake replied firmly, ‘ We keep going.’

Sarah and his cousins were right below him. But how deep down, he couldn’t tell at the moment. Until he found the base of the Zhorions, there was no chance that his Quest would be completed.

Getting closer to the goal, the duo continued to fumble in the dark, exploring each new corridor in the hope that it would be the right one. Unsurprisingly, the number of enemies continued to grow and so did their level of threat. The last wolf to pounce on them had required Jake’s intervention to prevent Lu Yan from being disfigured.

It was a very tough fellow. His telekinesis worked even less smoothly on it than on the diplodocus, but this animal also had the particularity of being much faster and more alert. It seemed to be able to anticipate Jake’s mental arrows and avoided them each time with a skillful leap.

In the end, Jake lost patience and punched the wall beside him. The wall cracked and after one more blow, some chipped volcanic rocks fell to the ground. Without delay, he picked up one of them and like a baseball pitcher, his body stretched out like a bow before throwing the projectile at a speed comparable to that of a rifle bullet.

Also accelerated by his telekinesis, the wolf caught the stone in the face, thus producing a deafening sound wave. The creature died immediately, but the noise brought all the monster patrols for kilometers around. It was even possible that some Zhorions had been alerted.

‘Fuck! ‘Jake grumbled beneath his breath.

Al lmmr fl vu vft daralvut hpzlaro ovuaz gft iphc, ovu ezmprt guefr om lvfcu. A qmquro ifouz, ao jfl ovu lfqu lhuru fl Saqgf guare hvflut gw jaituguulol ar ovu Lamr Kare, gpo ovu prtuzemprt efiuzw suzlamr frt ar fgmlipou tfzcrull fl f gmrpl.

Running like a madman, Jake had long ago caught Lu Yan by the collar of her armor and had given up the idea of finding the prison where Sarah and the others had been taken. Given the army of monsters in these tunnels, it was simply impossible for them to advance any further. And even if they did, they still had to make their way back without alerting anyone. Literally impossible.

‘Do not let go of me in any way! ‘Lu Yan cried out in panic when she saw another one of those ferocious beasts biting her boot. A kick in the mouth got rid of it, but she was sweating like crazy after that fright.

‘Hmf! So what if I let go of you?! ‘Jake lashed out, not forgetting to throw a Soul Arrow in the middle of the herd, followed by a telekinetic blast that crushed all the hearts of the creatures in its wake.

As the creatures fell dead, the creatures in their wake stumbled in turn and a pile-up ensued, offering them a brief respite.

‘Phew, and now we’re leaving! What, where are you going?!’ Lu Yan panicked even more when Jake tossed her to the ground like a sack of potatoes.

‘I’m finishing the job. The Aether doesn’t wait.’ Jake said as he drew his machete once more with a predatory expression on his face.

Turning around, he sprinted in a few swift strides towards the wrecked herd and cheerfully began to slice apart all the still living creatures, taking advantage of their confusion to sow death in their ranks.