

# The Oracle Paths

## Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

### Chapter 298 - Sorry

At the center of this crowd, hundreds of humanoid aliens of various appearances were on their knees, chained at the foot of an altar forged in one piece from an enormous Red Crystal. From their motley appearances and the presence of a few humans in the group, including Sarah and his cousins, Jake knew right away that they were Players.

Dried blood had impregnated the altar, as had the slabs of the plaza. Some human-sized buckets contained severed limbs and heads, while others appeared to be filled with a thick liquid of different colors.

At first Jake naively thought it might be some kind of paint, but the unmistakable metallic stench left little doubt as to the nature of the liquid. It was blood. After all, red was not the only possible color.

The color of blood could be red, green, purplish pink, blue, and even white depending on what type of metal atom the metalloproteins in the red blood cells or plasma were made of. On the scale of the Mirror Universe, this variety of color was even greater than on Earth and there was enough different blood in those buckets to paint a rainbow.

'So many of them were captured?' Jake shuddered in amazement as he stared at the sight in front of him.

The crowd was ecstatic, chanting in rhythm a kind of tribal song with a foot tapping. Jake was somewhat baffled to see that most of these Zhorions looked malnourished and famished. Their faces were emaciated and their

muscles gaunt. The average age seemed very high and there were virtually no children in the crowd.

In their zealous eyes and toothy smiles, Jake could detect a kind of fanaticism and a troubling appetite. As if the prisoners in front of them were not living beings worthy of respect, but cattle, or rather the embodiment of a hope for which they were willing to commit the worst atrocities.

As for the prisoners, they were even more miserable. Most of them had pale and bloodless faces, as if they had lost a lot of blood during their captivity, or perhaps as if they had been deprived of sleep. Each tap of the crowd's foot on the ground made them startle with terror, as if all their pride and ferocity had vanished when they were brought here.

Jake was able to confirm that Sarah and Kevin were not yet in the same decrepit state as the majority of the prisoners, but this could be blamed on their more recent capture. Nevertheless, their expressions were austere and desperate. Although they appeared calm, Jake could sense the distress in their eyes. Clearly, they had already tried everything to escape in vain.

His cousin Kate, on the other hand, had red eyes after crying her eyes out. The terrified grimace on Noemie's severed head was still fresh in his memory and there was no doubt that it must have been a traumatic experience for the two women who were usually as thick as thieves.

As he began to pay attention to the other prisoners, the crowd suddenly stopped singing and instead started chanting a name as they turned toward the temple-like pyramid at the bottom of the cave.

The pyramid in question was probably as large as the famous Pyramid of Cheops, but instead of a human-sized entrance doorway, a rectangular hole several tens of meters high and ten meters wide had been dug directly into the monument.

Trying to look inside, Jake felt like he was trying to peer into the darkness. Like a black hole, no light seemed to escape from the depths of the building.

Instead of their ecstatic shouts, a drumbeat resounded from inside the temple, and soon a middle-aged Zhorion, about two meters high, came into view at its entrance. His skin was even darker than that of the other Zhorions, but his muscles were sharp and chiseled like those of a statue of a Greek god.

He wore a long black priest's robe, and a pendant ending in a red crystal the size of a tangerine adorned his thick, ox-like neck. His pupils glowed the same color and carried a vicissitude in them that Yerode and Lamine would not have envied.

Ir val hfiimplut vfrt, f imre lhaqaofz jaov nzuhampl lomrul frt fr arlhzagut giftu varout fo aol npznmlu.

As expected, the priest and perhaps city leader began to walk slowly toward the altar in the center of the crowd. Most of the prisoners recognized him with fright, so much so that even the most fragile ones pissed themselves upon seeing him.

Jake was completely shocked by the sight. After enduring the first and second trials, the remaining contestants were supposed to be the toughest-minded Players among 11 million contestants. They were supposed to be smiling in the face of a torture session, no matter how gory it was.

Even Jake had been eaten alive several times before slowly adapting to the battle at sea. Except for a few extremely talented or lucky Players with a specific skill that had helped them overcome that first trial, everyone else had gone through the same agony before reaching shore.

Therefore, it was all the more disturbing for him to see that even Sarah and Kevin were shaking at the mere appearance of this individual. This made him even more hesitant about trying to save them. One mistake and he would end up like them in sacrifice with a chain around his neck.

Jake reassured himself mentally by clenching the handle of his machete so tightly that his knuckles had turned white. He was also sweating quite a bit, although he wasn't aware of it at all.

Seeing the priest Zhorion advancing nonchalantly toward the crowd and looking only at the altar in front of him, Jake was tempted to launch a surprise attack, but another movement in the periphery of his field of vision immediately dissuaded him from doing so.

Seconds after the priest left the temple, a clawed hand the size of a minivan burst out of the darkness inside the temple and grabbed one of the walls demarcating the entrance as if the creature owning that hand needed support to stand upright.

In the next moment, Jake watched with growing disbelief as the largest humanoid monster he had ever seen in his entire life appeared. Even in video games or movies, such a monster was not often pictured on screen.

Slowly crawling out of the darkness of the temple, the monster crept out of the pyramid with difficulty, and once outside, it stood up, shaking the cave with every move it made. Once upright, its skull was almost touching the vault that formed the ceiling at the top of the cave.

Io jfl ovu lfqu tfzc frt vfaziull vpqfrmat qmrlouz ovfo Jfcu vft dmpevo tpzare val luhmrt ozafi. Ekhuno ovfo oval hzufopzu jfl rmo our mz dadouur Quouzl vaev, gpo ovu vuaevo md f lcwlhznuz. lol uwul juzu rmo ezuur gpo zut, frt f gfovopg-laxut zmhc md Fiaroapq vpre fzmprr aol ruhc. Tvu zmnu ovfo qftu pn ovu nurfro jfl f ovahc louui hvfar, ovu cart plut om qfcu ovu frhvmz md ovu ifzeulo mhufi iaruzl.

Once on its feet, the goofy-faced monster swept across the city as if it was scanning the entire cave with infrared light and for a split second Jake's eyes met those of the creature. At that moment, his mind went blank and he felt as if his brain was about to explode.

Fortunately, just as he was starting to realize the full extent of the danger, the monster's gaze continued on its way, totally unaware of the measly microbe it had almost destroyed with a single glance.

It took a few seconds for Jake to recover and he realized that he was shaking and sweating almost as much as the prisoners in the middle of the crowd. This had to be the most scary thing he had ever met in his entire life.

Even the Brain Eater devouring the brain of the hero Myrmid in the first Ordeal had not left him with such an impression. Well, one had to admit that the Oracle had saved him just in time back then...

Jake thought that with such a bodyguard, the priest already had nothing to fear, but he had underestimated the prudence of this Zhorion. After this giant monster, about a hundred similar aliens crawled out of the temple. None of them were so ridiculously large and overpowered, but their size gave him no cause for celebration either.

The smallest was almost ten meters tall, and several of them were more than fifty meters high. On top of that, these creatures were not naked and wore full armor forged in some black alloy. Only their bald skulls and long, pointed ears were exposed. Each of them also had a Red Soul Stone around their necks.

Clearly in charge of the priest's safety, these creatures spread out in a tight line around the crowd. Only the first monster remained respectfully behind the priest in charge of the ceremony.

Witnessing this implausible scene, Jake had long been slackjawed. Any doubts he still had about saving his companions had vanished. He was brave, but not suicidal.

'Sorry guys... But, I won't be able to save you this time. I sincerely hope that your death will be quick and painless... See you on B842.'