

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 302 - Fighting a Zhorion

For the next few hours, Jake grew dull at all these executions. The Zhorion priest had no intention of stopping and the crowd seemed to gorge themselves on these barbaric acts like geeks bingewatching their favorite TV series.

The day passed and the number of participants still in the running continued to drop at a dizzying rate. However, the prisoner sacrifices taking place right in front of him were not enough to explain such a hecatomb alone. The other Zhorion tribes were probably doing the same thing.

Even after several hours, only about fifty prisoners had been sacrificed and luckily Sarah and the others were not among them. In contrast, more than 100 Players had been eliminated during those few hours. Including the prisoners, they numbered just under 900.

When night fell, which Jake could only know from the time indicated by his bracelet, the sacrifices came to an end. As placidly as he had come, the Zhorion priest walked back quietly toward the temple and disappeared inside.

Once far from the Red Crystal's soul energy, the Zhorion had reverted to his appearance of a graceful middle-aged man, although his cruel grin made him seem rather nightmarish to the prisoners and his own people.

Jake kept a close eye on him until he disappeared inside the temple, and with his keen eyesight he noticed a crucial detail. Even the Zhorions were not immune to the negative effects of Flintium.

The priest seemed to be able to control the output of energy consumed, but not perfectly. The Zhorion's robust physique had thinned considerably and his skin was dry and moderately cracked. Right now, he was at his weakest.

Could this be a trap? Was the Zhorion faking his weakness? Jake could not be certain.

'Too bad, I'd better find a way to get away. If they found Lu Yan, maybe they can find me, too.'

Pzmsaturhu luuqut om vfsu vufzt val niuf. Fmz bplo fdouz ovu nzaulo urouzut ovu ouqniu, ovu eafro vpqfrmat qmrlouzl dmiimjut vaq, hzmpvhare, hzfjiare, mz jzaeeiare ovuaz jfw arom ovu lfhzut gpaitare, jvahv immcut qmzu iacu f tmevmpu dmz fozmhaoaul.

The skyscraper-sized colossus struggled to get through the door, but eventually it too disappeared, leaving the altar empty except for the crowd and a hundred guards.

These guards did not seem particularly threatening, but he did not intend to underestimate them. Their eyes were alert and waves of mental power swirled intimidatingly around them.

'Maybe I have a chance now...' Jake eyes lit up when he saw that the main threat was gone.

[Don't try to save them. Too risky.] Xi reminded him succinctly.

'I know. I'm not senile yet.' Jake tsked as he took one last look at Sarah and Kevin in the square.

[I hope so...]

Xi knew him better than he knew himself. She knew what was going through his mind right now. Her warning was not just out of concern.

Knowing that she was right, Jake jumped off the roof and hovered low in the opposite direction. For today at least, these comrades were safe. He estimated that in three or four days all the prisoners in that town would have been sacrificed.

Four days was too little to drastically increase his stats or skills. Even if he succeeded, his comrades would probably already be dead or nearly dead.

Alternatively, he could avenge them later. For this reason, Jake intended to return to the volcano and temper his body until the descent of the Phantom Sanctuary. As long as he remained watchful of the Zhorions' movements, it would be easy for him to know when the Sanctuary would descend.

[No need to keep an eye on them. You missed part of the Zhorion Priest's speech, but the bracelet recorded everything. The Phantom Sanctuary won't appear until the number of Players has been reduced sufficiently. Since there are only 100 places available, this is probably the condition triggering its descent].

'Except, the island's Zhorions will also be competing with us for those seats. 'Jake grunted with a gloomy expression. 'If each Zhorion tribe has captured as many prisoners as this one, we'll be less than 500 in four days. Probably less, considering that some Players would rather commit suicide or sacrifice themselves than be captured.'

[Indeed...]

What neither Jake nor Xi mentioned was that the timing of the descent from the Ghost Sanctuary was highly dependent on the talent of the 500 remaining participants. If they were good enough, maybe there was still time.

But if they were too good, these giant humanoid monsters of several tens of meters would most certainly be deployed. At that point, it would no longer be a matter of power, but how well they were able to hide.

In less than an hour, Jake reached the staircase through which he had come. Cautiously, he checked to see if the humanoid monsters in charge of watching over these entrances had indeed been called back, but when he saw no one he sighed in relief.

Without wasting any more time, he sneaked in and climbed the stairs as fast as he could. With only one direction to go, this passage was perfect for being ambushed.

It was always when one feared the worst that it happened. Only halfway to the top of the stairs, his ears twitched when he heard a heavy footstep above him that made the rock walls vibrate.

Alerted, he immediately stopped breathing and slowed his heartbeat to a minimum, but he knew by instinct that it was already too late.

Ir dfho, fl lmmr fl vu tuhalasuiw opzrut gfhc om fsmat Quuoare oval ruj uruqw, vu vufzt dmmolounl hmQare dzmQ ovu gmoomQ md ovu lofazl. Bmov tazhuoamrl juzu gimhcut.

Closing his eyes for a second, he remembered the untimely death of Lu Yan and the Zhorion priest's bracelet, and he knew immediately what had happened.

Just as the Players could locate each other using their Shadow Guide, these aliens probably had access to a similar function. After absorbing so many bracelets, chances were that their Oracle device knockoffs were better than their own in some aspects.

Aware that he had fallen into the enemy's trap, Jake stopped moping around unnecessarily. Instead of turning back as he intended, he started climbing again, flying at full power.

A slight blast exploded behind him, deforming the nearest steps and like a missile trapped in an updraft, he spiraled upward at breakneck speed. A few seconds later he met his opponent.

A Zhorion, but different from the crowd or the guards guarding the prisoners. His aura and physique was not as intimidating as that of the priest, but this alien was undoubtedly an important person in this tribe. The web of Aether and mental power within his Spirit Body was extremely dense, to the point that his own mind resembled that of a child in comparison.

But that didn't matter. He had no intention of confronting these Zhorions on their preferred terrain. Especially after seeing what the priest was capable of by simply saying a few words.

When the Zhorion saw him, his expression did not change one iota, as if this human was just a rabbit he had intentionally flushed out of his burrow. The glow in his red eyes suddenly intensified as he met his gaze and Jake felt a mental wave with a distinct frequency enveloping him.

Immediately, he felt his lucidity fade into a sordid emotive state, and the Zhorion in front of him suddenly appeared much larger and terrifying.

In the milliseconds that followed, his mental state fluctuated many times between various unfavorable emotions, oscillating between fear, admiration, fatigue, guilt and despair. With each cycle, these emotions became more powerful as his Spirit Body began to resonate with the rhythm of the enemy's mental waves.

Baoare val omrepu om ovu nmaro md gimmt lm fl rmo om nzmlozfou
vaqluid gudmzu ovu uruqw, Jfcu lrmzout arlouft frt hmroarput om
fhhuiuzfou jvaiu aermzare val mjr qurofi arlofgaiaow. Suuare ovu vpqfr
gudmzu vaq zulaloare val Spgqallamr ouhvraypu, ovu uwul md ovu
jfzzamz Zvmzamr gpieut liaevoiww.

Sadly for him, it was too late. Jake rammed into him with the momentum of a race car after a long straight and a pleasantly soothing sound of broken bones chimed in his ears.

Barely slowed down by the impact, Jake continued his flight and hugged his victim tightly as the victim tried to draw the long knife from his belt. As Jake pulled his legs up, he locked the Zhorion's hand to prevent him from accessing his weapon, then realizing that he had the physical advantage, he braked hard with his feet on the ground and then pushed with all his might.

Until then, Jake had flown horizontally across the floor, and by this action, he and his enemy impaled themselves directly onto the ceiling of the gallery. Jake was in a lower position due to his attempted tackle and it was the Zhorion's head that took the full brunt of the impact.

The alien's head was hard and did not sink into his chest like a nail. Nor did it explode like an egg hitting the ground. However, the Zhorion was knocked out by the impact and his skull bled profusely.

Shiny red blood ran down Jake's face and his thirst for murder was instantly aroused. This was the enemy's weak spot. From the moment his blood had touched Jake's skin, his fate was sealed.

His Myrtharian Bloodline was momentarily pumped up and this surge of strength gave him the power he needed to defeat his opponent. Even his Spirit Body had regained the upper hand over the enemy's soul skill.

With this boost in strength and speed, Jake unhesitatingly chopped off the Zhorion Warrior's head and as he was about to inspect his corpse, he heard the footsteps of his pursuers still in the stairwell.

Pressed by time, he simply grabbed the corpse by the leg and fled into the darkness along with his booty.