

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 308 - Chaos Everywhere

Just after Jake disappeared underground, a huge BOOM shook the earth, the resulting jolts nearly causing him to lose control of his Aether. The epicenter was exactly where he had been a mere second ago. If that had happened, the hundreds of tons of rock around him would have buried him in an instant.

His body was strong enough to withstand that kind of pressure, like a block of metal could support the weight of a mountain without necessarily breaking, but it definitely would not have been without consequence. A block of metal was not hollow, which was not the case with his skull or rib cage. His soft tissues were not prepared for such a test, even with his Stone Skin Skill.

Sure, he would have survived, but he would not have been able to carry out his genius plan. Speaking of genius plan, phase one went pretty much as planned and he was already reveling in the reaction that this Zhorion priest would have when he triggered the second trap.

While Jake silently propelled himself through the rock like a rocket, the Zhorion Thralls were still searching for the culprit.

Some of them had already begun sacrificing themselves under the orders of the priest and the Zhorion warriors who commanded them. These humanoid creatures had virtually no free will, as did animals with a crystal inlaid in their foreheads.

In this case, several of these monsters had thrown themselves into the lava fountain and had already partially blocked the hole by obstructing it with their

own bodies. Other Thralls, accompanied by a few guards, were in charge of dispersing the crowd of civilians to safety.

The guards in charge of monitoring the prisoners were in an extreme state of alert after seeing their ranks so easily decimated by Jake a moment earlier.

All the abilities of this Player seemed to counter perfectly theirs to the point that they had a hard time putting the docile prisoners under their control and this Player in the same league.

This was a terrible mistake. Some prisoners who had not made a wave since their capture, seemingly having given up on escape, suddenly went into action after exchanging a tacit glance with each other.

The Nosk who was sitting cross-legged on the ground was one of these prisoners. His luck could be considered extremely bad for having been treated like trash by these Zhorion cannibals.

This Nosk was not very belligerent and relatively cautious compared to other members of his species who were always looking for tastier and more respectable prey. This was normal after all since he was the weakest of his species to participate in this Ordeal. Nevertheless, he should not be underestimated. He was still in the top 50 of the Player Ranking.

While his Ordeal was going well, the Chaos tribe had suddenly started to capture and exterminate the participants and he had at first easily repelled the first wave of *àssailants*. Except that he had only eliminated the crystal fiends under their control, not the Zhorion controlling them.

After estimating its capabilities, the Zhorion had called for reinforcement and a Thrall more than fifty meters high was then deployed. As strong as he was, he had been crushed in seconds.

Another Nosk had also been captured during the blizzard a few weeks earlier, but had long since been sacrificed. Back then, these Zhorions weren't even actively chasing the Players, so his fellow Nosk's luck could be considered even worse than his own.

Such a story was not so uncommon among the prisoners. Of the more or less 150 Players captured, five of them were among the top 100 and had experienced similar misadventures.

Jake had almost experienced the same thing when a Zhorion warrior on his trail ambushed him on the stairs at the entrance to the city. These Zhorions had their own bracelets so they could easily find the participants, but until they knew their appearance and name, it was impossible for them to specifically target them.

Hmjusuz, f duj lfhzadahul frt f Murofi SpgQallamr ouhvraypu jfl urmpev om immlur ovuaz omrepul. Tvu iuftuzl md oval Zvmzamr ozagu vft imre larhu mgofarut fii ovu tuofail md ovu Pifwuz Rfrcare. Tvuuv vft ovu rfQu md ufhv nfzoahanfro fl juui fl ovuaz zfrcare frt caiil.

This gave them a clear idea of the participants' dangerousness. The reason why Jake had not been hunted like his comrades was simply because he was higher ranked. The Zhorions simply wanted to reduce the number of Players competing before the arrival of the Phantom Sanctuary, not take unnecessary risks.

It was only now that the Ordeal was nearing its end and the less able participants had been taken prisoner or sacrificed that they began to chase the higher ranked Players more actively.

If Jake had not decided to explore the secret passage by slaughtering all the enslaved creatures under their control, the Zhorions would not have cared about him so soon. Those top 100 prisoners who had been captured or killed were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time, or had by their actions provoked the ire of this tribe.

The Nosk, for example, simply thought he had done nothing special to deserve his fate, but he had unknowingly destroyed, while fighting one of the island's Monster Bosses a restricted area of the island where a grass called Blood Flower was growing.

One of the active ingredients extracted from this plant was used in the making of the crystals that enslaved the island's animals, but could also be consumed directly to regenerate the vitality lost in the Berserk mode. Its regular consumption reinforced the body's tolerance to Flintium and it was a rare and high-end food in their society.

Only Zhorions of a status similar to that of the priest had access to this type of treat. It was therefore no surprise that massive means had been deployed to take revenge on this wretched Nosk.

Anyway, the main thing now was that the guards and the Thralls were too busy to worry about them. The Nosk had never feared the Zhorions themselves, only the Thralls. The other prisoners who still had an ounce of energy shared the same point of view.

In perfect synchronicity, as if they had rehearsed a choreography together thousands of times, the prisoners moved as one body. The chains that hindered their movements and connected them to each other became their new weapons.

Multiple chains rattled as they hung on the ground, alerting nearby guards, but it was already too late. Seconds later, those unwary Zhorion guards were choking in the arms of those few prisoners.

Wvuovuz ovuw juzu Nmlc, vpqfr mz md frmovuz vpqfrmat lnuhaul, ovulu uqfhafout nfzoahanfrol vft f hmit frt quzhaiull immc ar ovuaz uwul. Nm qfoouz vmj qphv ovulu Zvmzamrl lozpeeit frt ifhuzfout ovuaz lcar jaov ovuaz hifjl, rmu md ovuq iuo em.

The Zhorion warriors, who had reacted in time thanks to the vigilance of their Spirit Bodies, immediately drew their weapons and rushed to the rescue of their comrades. The weaker prisoners who had neither the intention nor the energy to do anything were forced to join the fight and in an instant the place of the altar became a battlefield where blood and guts painted a bloody picture.

The priest clutched the sacrificial scimitar in his hand with unspeakable fury, but a restless gaze toward the ground and the lava fountain deterred him from rescuing his troops. Only the Ancient Designer knew where this infernal Player had gone, but that did not bode well.

If he left the altar, his Berserk mode would end and he would become a normal Zhorion warrior again. He was a preacher, not a warrior. However, he was not totally helpless, far from it.

Regularly, a psychic wave would explode from his body and petrify most of the prisoners on the spot. Those who already had little strength left had already knelt on the ground, a fanatical gleam in their eyes.

Normally, at least 90% of the participants would have suffered the same fate, but the priest was too afraid that this human would take advantage of his concentration to make a deadly attack. Because of this, his mental attacks were rather restrained as he had to keep his Spirit Body deployed at its maximum range in all circumstances.

On top of that, as the prisoners moved away from him, the impact of his Soul Skills on them was reduced. Soon, a few prisoners managed to escape his zone of influence and the situation degenerated a notch further.

In the almost minute it took Jake to reach the second trap above the city, the situation below had already descended into chaos. Many of the prisoners had broken free from their chains by using their jailers' weapons or other techniques of their own and were fighting two or three Zhorions at a time, usually in an unfavorable position.

More than 100 prisoners had surrendered to the enemy's Soul Skills, but the remaining Players were holding out despite their physical weakness and undernourishment.

As for the lava fountain, the sacrifice of these Thralls had been in vain. The lava was still spreading and those who had blocked it were already completely charred.

Fmzhut gw ovu pzeurhw md ovu laopfoamr, ovu Zvmzamr nzaulo vft om easu pn ovu nzmouhoamr md ovu lewlhznuz Tvzfii om daii ovu gzufhv. Nmrhvfifroiw, ovu eafro Qmrlouz npo val dmmo mr omn md ovu oprrui, frt ao tat ovu bmg usur ovmpév val dmmo guefr om lxxiu. Hmjusuz, ovu Tvzfii vft artuut guhmQu pluiull. Io hmpit rm imreuz Qmsu.

This was the moment Jake chose to reappear.