

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 310 - Just Another Zhorion

The lava rain was only possible because Jake was using his telekinesis to accurately obstruct the lava flow. The reason he was keeping his distance, looking down on the city from hundreds of feet was not out of fear, but because he had no choice. If he moved more than a hundred meters away, the lava would start pouring normally again. In other words, directly onto the sacrificial altar.

Still with the same satisfied smile on his face, Jake remained for several minutes with his arms folded at the top of the cave, contemplating with growing disbelief as his number of Aether points climbed along with his position in the Player Ranking.

All the prisoners who had surrendered to the Zhorions' spiritual techniques had already lost their free will and had not fled when the lava rain had fallen. More than a hundred participants had died without ever having to lift a finger.

When Jake put an end to the rain about 5 minutes later, his Aether points had finally surpassed 200 million, as had his Player Rankings.

[1st place : Jake Wilderth (Species : Human): 203,248,994 pts (117 kills)]

[2nd place: Krish (Species: Krish): 191,688,226 pts (316 kills)]

[3rd place: Bawopi (Species: Nosk): 182,387 255 pts (255 kills)]

[4th place: Hakkrasha (Species: Jakam): 177,634,283 pts (5 kills)]

[5th place: Krish(Species: Krish): 125,432,486 pts (193 kills)]

[6th place: Ruby Hale (Species: Human): 119,845,569 pts (114 kills)]

[7th place: Alef Smith(Species: Human): 99,231 862 pts (27 kills)]

[8th place: Fary Menodas (Human): 96,854,323 pts (33 kills)]

[9th place: Ryo Hayashi (Human): 91,564,238 pts (31 kills)]

[10th place: Enya Velseyel (Human): 81,968,661 pts (1 kill)]

[...]

[14th place: Brice Wilderth (Human: 32,064,846 pts (7 kills)

[...]

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[...]

[49th place: Kevin Wilderth (Human): 5.638,179 pts (0 kill)

[...]

[75th place: Will Hopkins (Human): 3,836,796 pts (0 kill)

As magical as it may seem, he was now 1st in the ranking, ahead of Krish and Bawopi, two aliens specializing in Player Killing. He knew the Nosks' temperament and abilities, so such a score was not really a surprise.

Jake hadn't been looking at the Player Ranking closely the last two days. On the one hand because of the mission, on the other hand because of his injuries. He was too busy thinking about how to destroy this city to get a maximum of points.

He consulted it regularly to check how his companions were doing as well as to find out how many participants were still in the race. He would also

occasionally take a quick look at the top of the ranking, but his time was too precious to squander it admiring those above him.

In any case, he had memorized the name of each participant with his photographic memory and he could easily recall their past rankings by comparing the previous mental images in his mind.

In spite of the joy and apprehension he felt at the prospect of being so suddenly first in the rankings, it had also made him pay more attention to his more direct competitors. And, to say the least, the situation had changed in the last few hours.

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Gaining points on its own meant relying on the feats and mission rewards. Jake wasn't even sure if he could get that many points in a year, and this alien had done it in less than two months. He couldn't help but be curious about the method this alien was using to score so many points.

The other surprise, of course, was Enya. Jake was one of his comrades. Just like Will, he monitored her ranking quite regularly. Just the day before, she was only at the 89th place, behind Will and Sarah.

After her sister's elimination, he thought she would soon give up, but he was wrong. The fact that she had a kill now and that the Nosk occupying this place in the ranking previously had disappeared hinted clearly at the course of events.

By contrast, Jake didn't give a damn about the status of his cousins in general and seeing that Brice, George and Kevin were all in the top 50 was not necessarily good news.

They shared the same last name and their recent rise to prominence had certainly already drawn attention to them. Maybe even those Nosks and Krishs freaks had already targeted them.

But as Jake quickly checked on his other companions like Sarah, Tim, Lily, Kate and the two Ziuids, he noticed that something was wrong.

Sarah's name in the rankings was nowhere to be found. She should normally have been ranked around 50th place.

Jake, who had just put an end to the lava rain, then looked down towards the altar and when he saw the giant stone bowl covering the young woman below him his ecstatic face suddenly became horrified.

'Don't tell me that... Fuck!'

Nmj ovfo ovu ifsf zfar jfl msuz, f hflhftu md ifsf jfl nmpzare tazuhoiw mrom ovu fiofz, lpgquzeare ovu lomru gmji fiqmlo uroazuiw. Ir hmrofho jaov ovu qmiour zmhc, jvahv jfl guojuur 700 frt 1200°C, ovu arouzamz md ovu lomru gmji vft imre larhu opzrut arom f dpzrfhu.

In panic, and not daring to believe that he could have made such a blunder, Jake jumped straight down to the altar. With a telekinetic blast, he pushed all the lava away from the giant crystal, forming a spherical force field around it. He didn't forget to emit a good dose of ultraviolet light to counter the Flintium energy either, but there was so much half-cooled lava on it that it was useless.

By the time Jake waded through the molten rock towards the rock bowl covering the young woman, he had already lost all hope. The Player Ranking could not be wrong.

For him, this heat was nothing. Hardly worse than a slightly hot summer day. But for a woman like Sarah, it was hell. Unconsciously, by dint of being so close to the lava, he had almost convinced himself that such heat was

tolerable for everyone. In the heat of the action, the sad reality had completely slipped from his mind.

Having to take responsibility, Jake inhaled deeply and lifted the rock with his telekinesis, unveiling the young blonde woman underneath... Or rather, what was left of her.

A perfect steam cooking at over 500°C. Sarah already had no arms, no legs and now she really looked like a log that had spent the night in a fireplace...

When Jake had lifted the lid, a cloud of steam had immediately escaped as when opening a pressure cooker, leaving only a charred and unrecognizable corpse as the only evidence of Sarah's passage on this island.

'Holy shit...' Jake stammered with a pale face. He had really screwed up big time on this one.

Just thinking about Sarah's reaction when she would see him again at the Red Cube, he already had a headache. Slowly steaming to death in a lava oven was probably even more painful than being dismembered...

Deep down he was horrified and had no idea how Sarah would behave with him after that. If she hated him, it would be perfectly understandable.

[Stop feeling guilty. What's done is done. There's nothing you can do to change that. At worst, you'll compensate her properly when you get back].

Xi commented in an exasperated tone.

Even in the data she had access to, friendly fire between comrades was not so rare. It was much better for this to happen during the Second Ordeal, where one could revive, than at the Fifth Ordeal, where death was final.

'Who are you?'

Jake was about to answer her, when a deep, parched voice exploded behind him with enough power to shake the walls of the cave. The buildings most damaged by the lava rain did not hold up and crumbled instantly.

Alerted, Jake spun around as he flew high into the air in one big burst. In less than a second, he had reached back the vault of the cave, a few meters away from the lava cascade. His gaze was now focused on the owner of this voice.

To his surprise, it belonged to the skyscraper-sized Zhorion Thrall. All along the altercation, the giant monster had remained motionless and silent, its foot in charge of plugging the lava fountain not having moved since the beginning.

Seeing two ruby eyes the size of truck wheels staring at him with curiosity, Jake felt a shiver run down his spine. Surprisingly, he felt no hostility from the monster.

‘There’s no need to be so wary.’ The Thrall chuckled while shaking the earth again.

‘It’s a shame my tribe was so miserably wiped out, but just like you, they’re Players in their own way. Even leaving this Thrall to them, they were unable to save themselves. Their death is well-deserved. In the same way that you killed those prisoners without hesitation, I don’t care about their lives. Those who were holed up here underground were nothing but losers, outcasts among my kind.’

‘Who are you?’ Jake asked with furrowed brows. The tone of this Thrall was a little bit off, almost friendly.

‘Just another Zhorion, but it doesn’t matter. Sigh... Time’s already up. I hope we meet again.’ The giant monster answered solemnly.

At that moment, the reddish color in its pupils was replaced by a multicolored shimmer of light and the huge Flintium Stone around its neck

disintegrated. After that, the presence was gone and the Thrall collapsed to the ground triggering a small earthquake. The seemingly invincible monster was dead.