

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 317 - A Small Favor

‘What do you want from me?!’ Jake yelled with a mocking tone. ‘If you know everything about me, you should already know that I won’t give you the liquid alloy and since I’m not stupid either, I know very well that you can’t do anything to me or you would have already sacrificed me on the altar.’

Facing the stubborn man in front of her, the Zhorion woman’s face twitched several times, but to Jake’s surprise she managed to contain herself and retained her gentle smile. Compared to the priest of the Chaos tribe, her self-control was commendable. Though, admittedly, she was not influenced by any Flintium.

‘I know for sure that you won’t give me your metal,’ she admitted straight away after recovering her peacefulness. ‘I’m not allowed to take it from you anyway, not even to exchange it for an equivalent reward. It’s too late to get the metal back and I know I can’t convince you.’

‘So what do we do? And why are we still talking?’ Jake asked, this time in a perplexed tone.

While there was a lot to learn from this potential Zhorion Instructor, he didn’t see what he could bring to the discussion. Other than the System’s name and the Asteroid where he was passing his Ordeal, he didn’t know much about this place and even less about something that would be of interest to an alien of this caliber.

On the other hand, he knew that she had an Oracle Device or something similar on her wrist and her rank was probably higher than his because of the ease with which she had retrieved his data. This meant that with the right wish, she could theoretically manipulate him and persuade him of anything by following her Shadow Guide' instructions if such a Path existed.

Naturally, the thinking process that Jake was going through had no secrets for the young woman and she had no fear of being tricked or deceived. The Aether fluctuations caused by Jake's thoughts made this impossible.

'There is no need to panic. 'She eventually broke the silence as she ran her hand through her hair in exasperation. 'The deal is simple. I'll answer some of your Questions and you answer mine. The report on you does not include the happenings of your Ordeals. I'm even willing to turn you into a Zhorion Viscount right now for a small favor, how about that? '

'What's the catch? 'Jake replied with the meticulous seriousness of a businessman about to close an important business deal. 'And how do you plan to do that? What are the pros and cons? How will I look after that? Will it affect my personality and my instincts? Will I lose my current bloodline or is there a risk of conflict between these bloodlines if I do so? What about the risk associated with...'

Faced with the avalanche of Questions from this human, the Zhorion woman was seething inside and a bestial grunt escaped from her mouth involuntarily. In response, a sly smile appeared on Jake's face when he noticed that she wasn't actually that good of an actress.

With the control provided by his Agility, he could indeed regulate his body language and not let anything show, but with his Spirit Body's fluctuations being perfectly visible, Jake had just realized that controlling his expressions and gestures was useless in front of a soul and Aether specialist.

Any participant with his intelligence and perception stats could easily deduce his true intentions and emotions from the Aether's behavior within his Spirit Body or brain. Until he knew how to interfere with the Aether Vision and Extrasensory Perception of his enemies, being a good actor had indeed become useless.

As a result, Jake didn't care anymore about being expressive, even if it meant appearing rude or insulting. At least the exchange between the two was honest. For an introverted person like him, it was just perfect.

Al dmz ovu Zvmzamr jmQfr fgmsu vaQ, lvu luuQut om gu ypaou ouQnuzfQurofi frt qftu rm zufi uddmzo om vatu vuz gft Qmmt. Adouz fii, vu vft lomiuur f nmzoamr md vuz vfzsulo.

Yet, he could not clearly read her Aetheric signature. There was a kind of Aether veil intentionally wrapped around her Spirit Body that interfered with his senses. The emotions she was showing could very well be faked and flaunted to put him at ease.

As Jake wondered whether the young woman's outward frustration was real or not, she began to answer his flurry of questions, but the answer came much shorter than he expected.

'Becoming a Zhorion Viscount is simple. I bite you, I drink a little bit of your blood, you drink a little bit of my blood and it's done. Quick and painless.'

'Like a vampire?' Jake blurted out with skepticism.

'Phew! Don't compare me to those cheap bloodsuckers.' She loudly protested against such an allegation.

'I'm sorry, but I saw what the Zhorions were doing in that cave, and to call them blood drinkers or vampires would be an understatement. Cannibal or ghoul might be closer to the truth.'

‘You... Do not mix the Zhorion aristocracy with these corrupt tribes who are under our domination. We cannot really be considered of the same species and we hardly ever meet each other except in such circumstances where we come to collect the alloy or the annual Soul Stones tribute. ‘

Mmmm...She had just leaked some very interesting stuff in a few words. Talking with this woman was indeed worthwhile.

‘You’re an Instructor? And why do these Zhorions have different bracelets from ours? They are clearly not participants, but you seem to have a bracelet connected to the Oracle System. Why do you have a bracelet connected to the Oracle System? Who was the Zhorion that controlled the Giant Thrall? Unlike you, he didn’t seem to mind the disappearance of this city.’

‘I already told you I’m not an Instructor. ‘She retorted with irritation. ‘ I am just the granddaughter of a Zhorion who is one. My father is an Oracle Overseer from the System A0 where we are and my grandfather is an Instructor who only reports to the Oracle and the Ancient Designer.

‘As for the Zhorion who controlled the huge Thrall next to us...‘ She started counting on her fingers. ‘It should be Vishni, another very influential Zhorion who has the trust of the Ancient Designer. But he’s different from me. He’s a Player, just like you and the other participants, but with many more Ordeals to his credit. Instead, answer my question? Do you accept to be turned into a Zhorion Viscount in exchange for a favor? I assure you that the gain in power is incomparable to your current bloodline, even though I admit that this Myrtharian bloodline does have some potential.’

‘I decline. ‘Jake shook his head with a straight face.

BOOOM!

The temple behind had just blown up. Jake couldn’t help but swallow with difficulty looking at the state of the monument behind him which was already

getting swept away by the lava tide. Soon there would be nothing left of this once majestic building.

‘Ugh...’ The young woman clasped her head with both hands when she saw the irreparable damage she had just done in a burst of rage. In the end, she cast her eyes on Jake again and simply asked ‘Why?’

‘Because I don’t trust you and I guess that’s how these Zhorion Thralls are created. True, they were awfully strong to the point of being virtually invincible, but they were brainless as if their souls were blank. I’d have to be a fućkínġ moron to take a deal like that.’

‘It only happens when the individual’s mind is too weak and can’t handle the transformation.’ She objected promptly. ‘Or when the soul has already dissipated. If you are converted by a Silver Zhorion like me, the result will be completely different and you will become an aristocrat as I am, with unlimited growth potential.’

‘Well, yeah, tell that to someone else.’ Jake scoffed at her as he got impatient. ‘Instead, tell me what favor you’re talking about and when I know more I’ll make my decision.’

It wasn’t that Jake was in a hurry, but the lava level had risen again during those few minutes and he was starting to have trouble keeping his mouth out of the lava. To put it mildly, it was quite tedious.

‘All right... I just want to know one thing. When you enter the Ghost Sanctuary later, tell me what you learned inside. If you tell me the truth, I promise not to come looking for you personally when B842 loses its diplomatic immunity. Who knows, I might even be able to give you a hand.’

‘Why don’t you ask another Zhorion you trust instead?’ Jake found such a request to be meaningless. ‘The priest of that tribe said himself that most of the slots were claimed by the Zhorions training on the island each time the

Phantom Sanctuary descended. With your abilities, entering this Sanctuary should be child's play, right ?'

As if she was expecting such a misunderstanding, the young woman uttered a long sigh of consternation.

'I can't do it. 'She finally said. 'It is forbidden. Only the Chaos, Dream and Harmony tribes are allowed to train here. Silver aristocrats like me are not allowed to interfere with the running of the Ordeal, nor to enter the Phantom Sanctuary. We are also not allowed to have an Oracle Device except for this inferior bracelet that we use.

'My situation is different because of my father's status as an Oracle Overseer, but I am subject to the same restrictions. My father lends me his Authority and computing power, but my bracelet is the same as the other Zhorions'. Apart from concealing myself and detecting other Oracle Device wearers, its use is limited.

'Our only way to get a real Oracle Device is to sacrifice the participants' alloy to the Ancient Designer in order to get a bracelet. These tribes are paid graciously to steal your bracelets and once in a while a Silver Zhorion like me comes here to collect these alloy tributes so we can get a bracelet or purify our bloodline. When you stole the alloy stored under the altar, it alerted me and I came to collect the metal in emergency. Because of you, my future bracelet will be one grade lower than originally planned... '

This time her pouting face was heartfelt. Jake was rather intimidated by her at first, but he had figured out that the young alien was probably not much older than he was. In fact, she was quite immature. The reason she was so strong was probably because of the overwhelming Aether density prevailing on the asteroid. If she lived outside the Bubble in System A0, such a power was perfectly normal, even if he didn't think her strength was enough to withstand the gravity on the asteroid...

‘I accept the deal, but how will you ensure that I keep my end of the bargain?’

‘Jake promised after careful consideration. ‘If the Oracle or the Ancient Designer can stop the Zhorions of the three tribes from spilling the beans about what’s going on inside the Phantom Sanctuary, then what’s keeping them from censoring me, too?’

‘Very good question!’ She giggled while hċking her lips. Even her tongue was silvery. ‘And the answer is... a Servant Contract.’