

# The Oracle Paths

## Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

### Chapter 321 - Friendly Tribe?

Enya twisted her head towards the cries and saw an Egean, a human from the same planet as her, clutching the Zhorion waiter by the throat with a look blinded by hatred. If two scaly-skinned aliens had not immobilized him, he probably would have strangled the Zhorion to death. Well, at least he would have tried...

‘What’s going on?’ A man’s voice sounded close to her.

Will was awake. Even Hakkrasha, who was usually a heavy sleeper, had ended his nap.

‘I don’t know. The Zhorion alien who distributes the food and drink appeared, said something, and this participant immediately tried to strangle him.

‘Oh... again...’ Will commented with a yawn still drowsy from his short nap. Clearly, he was used to this kind of clash.

Hakkrasha gazed at the infuriated Egean and the frail Zhorion with an expression that spoke volumes, and then just as Will immediately lost interest in them.

‘It’s happened before?’ Enya expressed her astonishment with a dubious face.

She and Hakkrasha had only been here for an hour, but Will seemed to have been here for a long time.

‘And not just once! ‘Will gave a forced laugh. ‘To be honest, this kind of scene happens several times a day. I don’t know about the other Zhorion tribes on the island, but this one has a different approach to reduce our numbers. Fights to the death, preferably between us. Each time they ask for a sacrifice, the participants present are free to choose who will be sacrificed.

‘Until a few days ago, they only asked for a little blood each day against lodging and food at will. Even though we were stuck in that tavern, it wasn’t so bad. Some of them, like this waiter, are even very friendly and you can learn a lot from talking to them.

‘ That changed about a week ago. Overnight they started asking for sacrifices. Of course, a reason was given. They want to reduce our number so that the Phantom Sanctuary will come down. On their part, they are also committed to sacrifice a member of their tribe for every participant sacrifice. When the participants here learned that the Zhorions would compete with us for the 100 places in the Ghost Sanctuary, most of them accepted the deal without batting an eyelash.

‘It was either that or a pitched battle between Players and the entire Harmony tribe. Some tried. And to say the least, it didn’t end well... The giant monsters that serve them are just too damn strong. To complicate things, some alien species actually love this deal. This is the case of the Nosks and Krishs who find single combat extremely honorable.

‘As of yesterday, they started asking for several sacrifices at once. People who are isolated and without companions have already been sacrificed long ago. The Players present now have to make sacrifices among their friends and tensions are getting higher and higher.

‘The human of your kind saw his little sister being escorted out of this room this morning by a few Zhorion soldiers. She didn’t come back and her name has probably disappeared from the Player Rankings ever since. Since this Player is too weak to take revenge on his group, he’s taking revenge on that

smiling Zhorion waiter whom he believes is responsible for everything that happens to them... What an idiot... He would have been better off laying low in a corner away from all eyes.'

Indeed. Just after Will concluded his speech, the Zhorion waiter scanned the participants with his polite smile without bothering about the hand grasping his neck. Serenely, his frail hand covered the human's hand against his throat and gently wrapped itself around one of his fingers.

Crack!

'Aaaaargh! Vega ter rylek! '(I will kill you!)

At first Enya thought it was one of her fellow citizens, but when she heard him scream she realized that he must be living in a neighboring country. Maybe it was because of the pain that he cursed him in his native language, but he didn't seem to have mastered the Oraclean.

Unsurprisingly, these threats were short-lived. The human was already restrained by two large aliens and no one seemed willing to risk his life to assist him.

'Is this one of the chosen sacrifices?' The waiter asked courteously, always with the same affable smile.

No answer. Even his former allies did not have the courage to assume the burden of having sent one of their comrades to his death.

'I take this silence as a yes.' The Zhorion in costume smirked approvingly at the crowd's reaction. 'Unfortunately, this is not enough. I need five more sacrifices this time.'

'What?! But the last time was four? Why six?' The former leader of the outcast, a humanoid monster as repulsive as an Orc vociferated with barely contained fury.

‘Does it make a difference?’ The Zhorion waiter calmly replied. ‘The sooner your number is reduced to 100, the sooner the next trial can begin. Of course, we will also choose 6 sacrifices on our side to show our good faith.’

‘Bullshit!’ An alien, who until then had been apathetic, spat disdainfully. ‘Where are your sacrifices?! We’ve never had proof that anyone was sacrificed on your side. Every day we are stuck in this room. We piss and shit over each other without being able to do anything! If the sacrifices don’t kill us soon, the smell will!’

The Zhorion waiter squinted slightly, but did not get angry.

‘What do you suggest in this case?’ The Zhorion spread his arms in an invitation to speak freely.

‘Our sacrificed against yours and the fight must take place in this room in full view of all.’

Far from being offended, the Zhorion tilted his head sideways with wonder, gazing at him as if he had just discovered a fascinating freak show event.

‘Are you sure?’ The waiter probed with the expression of someone barely holding back from cracking up laughing.

‘Definitely.’

‘You participants also agree?’ The Zhorion representative then gauged the opinion of the crowd.

‘I don’t care.’ A large Nosk croaked coldly without leaving his stone chair.

‘Krish!’

‘Sounds good to me...’

‘...’

Moments later, the decision had been approved and the waiter left to inform his superiors. Enya took the opportunity to ask Will the supreme Question.

‘By the way, how come you’re still alive? Didn’t you say the Players alone were sacrificed first?’

Will did seem to have taken a liking for his aura of mystery, for once again he responded with a bizarrely melodious chuckle.

‘I’m not alone. I am never alone...’

As he said this, he showed the hollow of his sleeves, and two sapphire-eyed cobras whistled in a bad mood as they were exposed for all to see. Will then beckoned for her to raise her eyes to the ceiling, which was over fifty meters high to house the Thralls.

When Enya looked up, a dark ceiling, almost devoid of light except for a few luminescent green crystals, covered her vision. Then as she focused, she suddenly saw the darkness come alive. Only then did she realize that the tavern ceiling was teeming with life.

‘A-all these creatures are with you?’ The young woman stammered in awe.

‘Not all of them, but most of them...’ Will explained nonchalantly.

Enya breathed sharply as she heard him confirm, but it also allayed her doubts. Will was on her side anyway. As for Hakkrasha, he was sleeping again.

A moment later, the Zhorion waiter returned to the room accompanied by six Zhorions dressed in rags and an escort of green-eyed Thralls the size of a small building.

There were three men and three women, but despite their shabby clothing that reflected their poor social status, their height and build was among the greatest they had ever seen among the inhabitants of this tribe.

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In comparison, the Krish leader had not recognized her. She was but an insignificant prey like the others. Did a cat remember all the mice it had hunted?

On the other hand, he remembered very well the bronze alien covered with horns that accompanied her. Even with all his comrades present he had no *désiré* to mess with them. As for Will, they could kill him whenever they wanted, but they would have to pay a price. It was pointless to take unnecessary risks when there were other weaker prey left to sacrifice.

In fact, if Will seemed relaxed enough to close his eyes, he was actually extremely tense. Without the creatures that kept him safe, he would have been dead long ago. It was a miracle that he hadn't killed anyone in self-defense yet.

Accordingly, five more sacrifices were quickly selected and the death fights resumed, this time in full view of all participants. After watching the results of the first few fights with horror, Enya had long since forgotten the changes to the Player Rankings that had shocked her so much a while earlier.

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In the meantime...

'Why is it that the Players keep getting fewer and fewer, even though I've eliminated an entire tribe?' Jake grumbled in a bad mood as he swam through the lava at a snail's pace towards the exit.

At that pace... The Phantom Sanctuary might well descend before he even made it out of that cave. He absolutely had to hurry!

