

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 325 - The Phantom Sanctuary

[Congratulations Jake Wilderth for being one of the 187 participants still in the running after having survived 1 month 26 days 3 hours 18 minutes and 17 seconds in the Sanctuary Bubble.]

[20M points for being first place in the Player Rankings.]

Jake, like many other Players, was surprised to hear the artificial voice they hadn't experienced since the beginning of the third round. If his memory served him right, the Battle Royale was not supposed to end until the 100 finalists had been determined.

The fact that the rewards were distributed in advance meant that the Sanctuary Bubble made a clear distinction between the third trial and what was to follow. By giving them their rewards now, the underlying message was that they could now die at any moment and that strength alone would not be enough. Hence the premature rewards.

By being first in the third trial, Jake was at least guaranteed an exceptional rating, even if he died shamefully in the next second.

What particularly shocked Jake was the exact amount of time he actually spent in the Sanctuary Bubble. He had not forgotten that his grandfather had been eliminated after a month and 26 days. In other words, the reason for his elimination probably had a lot to do with the conditions of the next trial.

Like him, Enya and Will were calm as they listened to the monotonous congratulations of the artificial voice in their heads, but not everyone was. A

few participants, although rare, were not prepared for the last trial to begin so quickly.

Once the congratulations and additional rewards were distributed, there was a pause, and then the artificial voice resounded in their minds again.

[The fourth trial will begin in 5,4,3,2,1,0.]

BANG!

A deafening sound of impact rocked the temple walls and the ground began to shake as if an earthquake had just struck right next to them. Some aliens raised their shields or arms above them to protect themselves from possible collapse, but their concerns were unfounded. The temple stood firm.

Tvur lptturiw, f juazt ovare vfnnurut. A lvzaii lmprrt zfre mpo rmalaiw fl ad lmqumru vft bplo jvaloiut tazuhoiw ar ovuaz ufzl, frt ovu lhuruzw gudmzu ovuq hvfreut zftahfiw.

Farewell to the cold walls, the stone tables and chairs. They could see the night sky again and they were randomly scattered on a gigantic platform several kilometers wide. No wonder the Zhorions did not consider them prisoners. They were not able to hold them.

In front of them, in the middle of the platform, a huge pyramid-shaped object was towering over them. The structure was many times larger than any Egyptian pyramid and its surface was carbon gray, veined with grooves of multicolored light that seemed to form a mysterious energy network.

Jake was fortunate enough to be only a few meters from the building and could not help but think that it looked oddly like a spaceship. The style of the light network reminded him somewhat of the blue light veined spherical ship that had distributed the Oracle Devices on Earth.

The models were different in terms of materials, shape, size and color. However, the feeling of unfathomably advanced technology was the same. It was not a technology that humans or even Zhorions could master.

Speaking of Zhorions, there were thousands of them. They too had been randomly teleported to the platform. With only 187 participants on the platform, the Players were clearly outnumbered. Moreover... The Zhorions had already started to regroup into factions.

The good news, however, was that none of these giant Thralls had been teleported with them. They were either trapped inside the temple below them or on the plain outside. A barely visible force field appeared to have shrouded the platform and prevented the Thralls from rejoining their masters.

Jake also realized with frustration that he had wasted his time trying to determine the landing point of the Phantom Sanctuary. He had spotted the scrawny silhouette of Tim, Lily and the two Ziuids a few hundred meters away from him...

The children and the two alien bears did not seem to understand where they were and there was no doubt that they had been teleported here without being asked. Their watchful eyes were constantly scanning their surroundings as they all joined hands to give each other some courage.

Not immediately finding Will and Enya, who may have been on the other side of the Phantom Sanctuary, Jake directed his attention to the wall of the pyramid in front of him.

Vuzw ypahciw, jvaiu jficare fimre ovu jfii dmz f duj Quouzl, Jfcu talhmsuzut fr prusurrull ovfo hmpit suzw juui qfzc ovu nzulurhu md f tmmz.Tvu Zvmzamrl md HfzQmrw ruko om vaQ vft rm arouroamr md qullare jaov vaQ frt vft film lofzout om hzmjt fzmprt ovulu prusur fzufi.

With a bit of elbowing Jake managed to make his way through the Zhorion crowd and he eventually saw the exact shape outlined by these irregularities.

It was indeed a door. Except that there was no handle or lock set. Without a thin rectangular groove measuring three meters by two meters, he may not have been able to draw the slightest conclusion.

Instead of a lock, or a futuristic authentication system, there were three half-sphere shaped holes about 20cm in diameter positioned about fifty centimeters apart each to form the three vertices of an equilateral triangle.

These three hollows were connected to each other by a deep groove that reminded Jake of those under the sacrificial altar of the Chaos tribe. He wondered if he had to sacrifice his bracelet to enter or something similar, but in one of the three slots he recognized the symbol of the Soul Spell that he had learned under the volcano.

‘Maybe...’ Jake’s face lit up when he thought of a possibility.

Indeed, he hadn’t tried anything yet, that a Harmony Zhorion tore the Green Soul Stone around his neck to everyone’s surprise and placed it in one of the three half-sphere shaped receptacles.

Bzzzzzzzz!

A humming sound similar to an insect buzzing came from the slot and the cavity quickly decreased in size to fit the dimensions of the inserted stone. An intense green light then exploded from the emerald stone and this light infiltrated the grooves connected to the other empty receptacles until it formed a triangle of green light.

After an initial success, Jake observed the Zhorions gathered around similar doors and saw them insert their Soul Stones into the empty spherical slots hoping to break through the locking mechanism.

Jfcu jfl fnnzuvurlasu fo dazlo, gpo jvur vu zufiaxut ovfo fii ovmlu HfzQmrw Zvmzamrl vft mriw Gzuur Smpi Somrul, vu hfiqut tmjr. Irlouft, f qmhcare lqaii hmsuzut val dfhu.

As he searched for Will, Enya and the others to tell them about his plan, the artificial voice resonated in their minds again.

[Once again, congratulations to all the participants for surviving until then. You have been teleported to the center of the island to the landing platform of the tribe of Harmony where the Phantom Sanctuary has just landed.]

Hearing this summary, the majority of the participants showed no change of expression, but a few like Tim and Lily were appalled.

[You may have noticed rectangular irregularities bordering three spherical slots on the inside forming a triangle. As the most perceptive among you have probably already understood, these are doors. There are exactly 100 of them.]

Jake already suspected this, but by mentally evaluating the distance between two doors, he concluded that this was accurate. 33 doors per side of the pyramid, which was 99 with three sides. One of the three sides had to have one more door.

[To unlock those doors, you will have to insert the appropriate combination of Soul Stones into the three slots. Ten of them can be opened with three Naequat Stones. Ten with Flintium Stones and ten more with Orxanium Stones. The remaining 70 doors need one stone of each type to be unlocked. A Soul Stone can be replaced by executing the corresponding Soul Spell.]

Most of the participants and Zhorions seemed to know what these Soul Stones were, but a few again showed nervous expressions and sweated profusely like baccalaureate students passing a test on a subject they hadn't studied. Some aliens especially, like Wurching, were far too dumb to care about such complex things. For such participants, the adventure would probably end here.

As if the artificial voice had taken pity on them, a mental image of the various Soul Stones briefly materialized in their minds before fading away.

On the other hand, anyone who had Soul Stones on them was instantly marked by a color corresponding to the stones on them.

Right now, Jake's body was wrapped in a beautiful red light. Seeing this, he chuckled bitterly as he peeked at the hundred or so Red Soul Stones he had stashed in his armor. Perhaps out of instinct, but also because he was immune with his ultraviolet radiance, he had taken quite a few of them off the vault ceiling of the Zhorion Cave before leaving the volcano.

Just like the liquid alloy, he was convinced that it could be sold at a good price in the Mirror Universe. His plan was to wrap them in a layer of liquid alloy that he couldn't digest, then swallow them all with the intention of making himself vomit once back on B842. He did not know if such a plan would work, but he intended to carry it through to the end.

As for those who were ignorant until then of the importance of these Soul Stones, their attitude changed drastically and the look they had on the Zhorions around them suddenly became more hostile.

A few Players who thought they were smarter had already planned to use these Zhorions to their advantage by letting them unlock the doors for them, but again the artificial voice seemed to have foreseen this kind of devious trickery.

[For those who think they can enter with impunity through a door already opened by someone else, give up that idea. As soon as a door is unlocked, the person who inserted the last stone will immediately be teleported inside if that person is the only person in contact with the door at that time. If more than one person is in contact with the door, the last stone cannot be inserted. Once the 100 doors are unlocked, the Phantom Sanctuary will take off again and the Ordeal will end automatically for the unfortunate losers. The other victorious participants will continue their fourth trial inside.]

[In two hours, no matter how many doors remain to be unlocked, the Phantom Sanctuary will also take off.]

[May the odds be ever in your favor.]