

# The Oracle Paths

## Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

### Chapter 337 - Brice's Foresight

Apart from the severely damaged condition of this room, the most striking thing was that the majority of the candidates were indeed there, though not all alive. Even Brice, whom he imagined to have failed miserably, was in this new hall, fresh and dashing.

However, his pupils and skin pores were dilated and his breathing was shallow and erratic. His hair and clothes were soaked and he reeked of a putrid ammonia smell. To escape from the previous trap unscathed had not been so easy and he had obviously paid a heavy price.

At the very least, he had lost his ethereal presence. Jake had no trouble focusing his attention on him anymore, just like the other Players, who were now carefully watching his every move in case he felt the urge to disappear again.

Will and Enya had also gotten there before him and were keeping a close eye on Hakkrasha, not daring to venture any further. Except for their pale faces and the heavy dark circles under their eyes, they didn't seem to have suffered.

'How is it possible?' Jake mumbled quietly with a dark face, realizing that he was indeed one of the last to overcome the trap in the previous hall.

As he searched for a reasonable explanation to justify Will and Enya's performance, his gaze instinctively drifted to the alien Hakkrasha standing ahead of them. Enya had not told him about her adventures, but it was the only sensible explanation. Even after overloading his stats, the Jakam's strength remained a mystery.

As he quickly scanned the room to get an accurate count of the Players and Zhorions present, he realized that several were missing, including the nine Zhorion leaders as well as Ruby and her two companions. An armored door at the back of the hall had already been opened.

The rest of the Players and Zhorions were scrambling to get through this door, but a circular disc covered with reddish runes had been placed above it like a wall hunting trophy.

In the object's center, a ruby about the size of an ostrich egg pulsed every second, giving off a deep heartbeat. Anyone who made it past a certain red line carved into the metallic floor would find himself under its influence.

With the exception of George, a wounded Zhorion, Hakkrasha, Will and Enya, all the other candidates had already lost their minds. All of them had fallen into madness and a bestial aura reeking of malice and killing intent was driving them to their doom.

**GRRRRRROWWL!**

The Krish leader, propelled by disgusting translucent wings covered with fluid, decapitated one of the Green-eyed Zhorions under his very eyes with his lightsaber, while Arrogant Warrior at his side had fallen into madness and treacherously ambushed his superior by stabbing him in the back with his mandibles.

The plasma rifles that they could have used to their advantage in this environment had been dumped on the ground when they lost their minds and one of these firearms was deformed at its tip, as if it had been stupidly used as a club instead of the rifle it was supposed to be.

Surprisingly, Bawopi's resolve was razor sharp. The Nosk kept reciting the same words over and over in his native language and his red eyes were glued to the half-open door at the end of the hall.

He was obviously under the influence of the Red Soul Spell, but his fury and bloodlust had not lost its direction. The Nosk, who was already a terrible adversary under normal circumstances, was marching step by step towards the door in Question, his dendrites wielding lightning and thrashing about in the air like long electric cables fallen from their poles.

‘Die!’

One of the Green-Eyed Zhorions leapt into the air with a forward salto and tried to impale the powerful alien with his spear, taking advantage of the inertia provided by his fall. The Zhorion’s Spirit Body mysteriously lined up with the tip of his spear, forming a second spear shrouding the real one. An emerald glow flashed in the alien’s dull gaze and a green light exploded forth from these two spears.

An unbearable screeching noise warped Jake’s eardrums on impact, but he didn’t look away. He watched live as this Zhorion, at first sight seemingly unstoppable, was effortlessly intercepted by a few dendrites winding wildly over Bawopi’s skull.

Instead of directly receiving the piercing double assault, the dendrites gently wrapped themselves around the spear until they tightly embraced the Zhorion’s arms in the air.

Kacha!

The spear, followed by the Zhorion’s hands and arms, were crushed into hundreds of pieces while a beam of high-voltage lightning charred the alien in a split second. Without Bawopi once taking his eyes off the door in front of him, the dendrite then threw the corpse away, which struck like a missile with surgical precision Arrogant Warrior whose mandibles were still trying to sever the spine of his leader in two.

His mandibles broke cleanly on impact, while the Krish flew off into the distance until it hit one of the walls with a big bang. The Krish leader, who

had regained his mobility, displayed a comical expression while the pain briefly restored his sanity.

He quickly took note of the situation, including their discarded plasma rifles, as well as the mandibles of his comrade still stuck around his ribs. He immediately felt the fury and outrage devouring this meager newfound lucidity and hurried to retrieve from his Space Storage an object shaped like a metal marble, which he pressed against his forehead. A ‘beep’ sounded and the object liquefied, streaming like shampoo down his body.

Irtadduzuro om ovu vpQfrl frt Hfcczflvf jvm tat rmo vfsu ovu hmpzfeu om urouz ovu Smpi Snuii tmQfar, vu diuj om ovu latu md val loaii loprrut prtuziare frt ezfggut vaQ gw val gzmcur Qfrtagiul fl ad vu jfl vmitare f louzare jvuui, frt opzrut samiuroiw om ovu zaevo om dmzhu ovu Kzalv om iau tmjr.

He then took out a second metal ball and repeated the procedure. When Arrogant Warrior came to his senses, his large, expressionless fly’s eyes wiggled in all directions, visibly prey to intense inner shame.

He was ready to accept his punishment, but the leader just gave him a nasty head butt and grunted ‘Krish’. After that, the two aliens dashed to the door at the end of the hall and left in the wake of Bawopi.

The few Green-Eyed Zhorions still alive continued to kill each other in front of Jake and the others until the last of them dropped dead from exhaustion, its body consumed by its Berserk rage.

It was only when the room calmed down that Enya and Will noticed Jake’s arrival.

‘How long have you been there?’ He asked anxiously.

‘About five minutes.’ Enya and Will answered at the same time.

Jake was taken aback, but he would rather not point out the incongruity. He had spent a considerable amount of time in the previous hall, but most of the time had been spent in illusion. Even the screams he had heard could be faked.

‘How did you get past the previous trap?’ He couldn’t help but ask again.

‘What trap?’ Enya repeated with a genuinely confused face. It was clear that she had no idea what he was talking about.

Will remained silent, but his frown spoke volumes. Faced with their apparent cluelessness, Jake didn’t know how to feel about it. According to their Aether fluctuations they weren’t lying, but he hadn’t reached a point where he could read thoughts and emotions with certainty.

The Zhorions, for example, had formed a kind of Aether veil around their Spirit Body that made it impossible to probe them with a single glance. After his recent experiences, Jake was no longer so inclined to deploy his Spirit Body without a good reason.

Seeing that George and Brice were openly listening to their conversation, he asked them the same question. Brice’s hateful grimace confirmed that he had not been spared either.

George looked good, but there was a good reason why he didn’t immediately rush into the new hall. Jake could detect significant mental and physical fatigue in his actions, similar to his own after being teleported into the Phantom Sanctuary. In fact, he looked injured.

His analyst cousin’s reply confirmed to him that they too had faced similar illusions.

‘If I didn’t have all these green gems and cooked up some countermeasures against these Zhorions, I would have been eliminated.’ George explained, staring at the red demarcations on the ground with apprehension.

Jake may have had no empathy for his cousins, but he knew when to put their differences aside when the situation called for it.

‘What are you waiting for to get in?’

Brice snorted and walked a little further before letting himself slump to the ground, with his back resting against the wall behind him.

‘We’ve already tried it. ‘George explained with a wry smile to apologize for Brice’s attitude.

Wvur Erwf frt Waii vufzt ovfo ovuw vft fizuftw ozaut, ovuw ufeuziw nzahcut pn ovuaz ufzl, gpo ovu zulnmrlu opzrut mpo om gu talfnmaroare.

‘Behind that door, there is another identical hall, then another and another... The same Red Soul Spell repeats itself, becoming stronger each time. The tricolor-eyed Zhorions unlock one door after another as if it were nothing, but I think they are starting to freak out.

‘From the third hall on, the Soul Spells begin to show variations and the Soul Spell is no longer fixed. The hall becomes a labyrinth with walls and floors that shift positions regularly. The solution for unlocking the door loses its simplicity and placing the required Soul Stone is no longer sufficient. In the fourth hall, strange humanoid monsters have replaced the traps. They look like the Zhorions Thralls, but their intelligence is high and they seem determined to eliminate us. They seem to be targeting our Soul Stones.

‘I turned back after being assaulted by these monsters for the umpteenth time.’

Jake listened to his cousin without saying a word, but he couldn’t help thinking that something was amiss in this story. Especially since, according to his own words, he had arrived long before they did, even though he had fallen into the same hallucinatory trap.

‘How did you make it back here? If it’s a maze, coming back would have been difficult and it would have been better to persevere to improve your rating, wouldn’t it?’ Will pressured him with an inquiring tone, taking the words right out of Jake’s mouth.

Brice, who was sitting in his corner, burst out laughing before George could explain. With a dismissive look on his face, he blurted out,

‘He can’t go on. He has no more Soul Stones.’

Then he stood up again and walked a little further, as if to tell them that he really had no intention of collaborating further.

‘What does that mean, George?’ Jake inquired with a threatening tone.

Hal hmplar lvzpeeut jaov f laev,

‘Exactly as he said. The monsters consume the Soul Stones and they’re needed to open the doors and defend oneself from the various traps. I’ve used them all up, so I’m out. Brice is in the same situation.’

George was certainly hoping for a reaction by informing them of the difficult challenges ahead, but Jake’s elated face was certainly not what he had in mind. Instead, his cousin patted him softly on the shoulder with a compassionate expression that could not be more fake and walked serenely into the Red Soul Spell domain as he said,

‘All right, you amateurs had done what you could. Grandpa won’t hold it against you. Let the pros do their job...’

Hakkrasha also patted his shoulder to add insult to injury, followed by Will and Enya who didn’t want to be outdone. George, who usually knew how to hold his nerve, flaunted his first ugly face, provoking another bout of snickering laughter from his cousin Brice at the other end of the hall.

Brice’s foresight was commendable. He had anticipated the humiliation from the start.

