

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 339 - The Maze

Identifying the clawed shadow crawling over the wall where the light arrow was located, Jake froze in place and unconsciously stopped his breath. Faced with the lack of reaction from these creatures, he realized that just as he was unable to hear them, they were also deprived of their hearing.

This was good news, but they could still see and smell him. If he got too close to the dim, pulsating glow of these luminous arrows on the wall, his position could be exposed.

The foul smell of rotten meat prevailed throughout the room, giving him a flimsy hope that he could sneak out unnoticed, but when a warm, viscous liquid that he now knew to be drool ran down his shoulder again, he knew that was simply not possible.

These monsters were in no hurry to devour him and seemed to revel in the idea of ambushing him by playing with his nerves. Or perhaps they were already full? Even though he had not yet been detected, he knew that with the stench of sweat and blood oozing out of him, it would not be long before it happened.

As he pondered over the various means at his disposal to locate them, he realized another incongruity: These monsters lurking in the dark had no Aetheric signature. At least, neither his Aether Vision, nor his Myrtharian Spiritual Eyes could detect anything.

There remained to him the possibility of deploying his Spirit Body, but after his recent misadventures, it was an option that he abhorred. Moreover, if

these creatures were receptive to his mental fluctuations, his position would also be revealed.

Of course, he still had the scan option as well. A minor scan didn't cost much, and the impulses were so brief that it was virtually impossible to detect them at his level. Determining its origin was even less plausible.

When another trickle of slobber joined the first one and a warm, pestilential gale came blowing in front of and behind him, he stopped stalling and took action.

A scan ripple spread throughout the hall and beyond, revealing all the monsters nearby. As he mentally reviewed the scan report, Jake drew a sharp breath and a chill ran down his neck.

There were not just one or two monsters around him, but hundreds! He felt as if he was watching these stupid reality TV challenges where participants had to put their hands in a tub full of sedated and venom-deprived tarantulas.

Except that here, these creatures were much bigger than tarantulas, and were perfectly alert. These beasts were between one and two meters long, with a narrow abdomen, six legs and a long tail, and they crawled all over the surfaces, including the floor, walls and ceiling. The only reason he hadn't squashed any of them so far was because they had silently moved away from his path, just sniffing at him.

He was so shocked because according to the scan, the jaws of half a dozen monsters were within five centimeters of his face and he had been totally unaware of them. Worse, one of them was even riding on his back! He hadn't felt anything at all!

Their faces roughly resembled those of the Zhorion Thralls, but their eyes were blind, while their long pointed ears had also disappeared in favor of two strange antennae.

Their jaw and their fangs of vampire had also developed abnormally, giving them a dentition reminiscent of a smilodon. If it were not for their dark and hairless skin, as well as the scan confirmation he could never have guessed that they were Thralls.

Like any human facing such a situation, Jake felt both a strong sense of fear and visceral disgust. His first instinct was to rampage forward first by darting to the half-open door before these monsters could react.

Waov f diahc md val jzalo, vu zuiuflut val hifjl frt fl ad lnzuffare val jarel, vu liao ovu ovzmfol md ovu ovzuu Qmrlouzl tazuhoiw ar dzmro md vaQ gudmzu ovuw vft oaQu om zuozfho ovuaz ruhcl. Hu film ojalout val ruhc fo 180 tuezuul frt lno mpo emgl md tzmmi fo lusuzfi vprtzut Cuilapl tuezuul arom jvfo vu ovmpervo juzu ovu uwul md ovu Tvzfii hiareare om val gfhc. Hal lfiasf usfnmzfout arlofroiw fl ao ukhuutut aol gmaiare nmaro frt ao jfl f gpzrare sfmz ovfo vao ovu Qmrlouz arlouft, ovu nfar Qfcare ao aqqutafouiw iuo em.

Weirdly, whether it was his claw strokes or the physical contact with the monster hanging on his back, he did not receive any physical feedback. His sense of touch also seemed to be negatively impacted in this room as well.

He also did not hear their bodies falling, nor their shrill shriek of agony. Without this auditory feedback, Jake was bewildered and struggled to feel the severity of his predicament. All he knew was that he had to get out of there as fast as he could before things got worse.

Upon sensing the death of their brethren, the hundreds of creatures swarming around him went from a placid, almost lethargic stillness to a coordinated frenzy, as if these monsters shared a single mind. Less than half a second after his first claw strike, all the Thralls pounced on him like a huge black tide.

A second scan's psychic ripple burst out of Jake once again, and he promptly chose the least crowded direction. Taking advantage of their blindness and deafness, he performed all sorts of acrobatics and contortions in the air to slip through the net. The monsters on his way that he could not avoid were torn to pieces by his claws, while he smashed like a battering ram all those that he failed to kill in time.

The distance to the half-open door leading to the next chamber was short, and therefore the battle turned out to be extremely brief. Nevertheless, when Jake finally closed the armored door on the other side to confine the Thralls, he was pale and his body was littered with lacerations and bites.

The jaw of one of the monsters was still clamped on his right shoulder blade, even after Jake had torn the monster's spine out with his own hands.

Once safe from these abominations, Jake grōānēd in pain and engaged his Aether of Vitality on the most worrisome lesions to stabilize them. With dismay, he realized that the wounds were still bleeding profusely, even the most benign ones. With his Vitality, standard cuts were supposed to clot in less than 9 seconds.

By scrutinizing the reports of the previous two scans more extensively, the saliva emerged as the culprit. In addition to being loaded with extraterrestrial bacteria abundant in feces and rotting flesh, it also had powerful anticoagulant functions.

These creatures would maintain the luster of their claws by smearing them with slobber and enjoyed suĉkīnġ blood and rotting flesh off them after their meal until they were spotless. The logical consequence was that they had the same bacteria and anticoagulant properties.

Adouz zuftare ovu zunmzo, Jfcu duio usur qmzu iacu smqaoare, gpo arlouft md duuiare lmzzw dmz vaqluid vu bplo diplvut fjfw ovu hmrofqarfout dipatl frt gimmt dzmq val jmprtl jaov val ouiucarulal. Tvu jmprtl darfiw lofzout om vufi fdouz val taiaeuro hiuflare.

Feeling better, Jake was finally able to pay proper attention to the new room he had just landed in. This room was not very large, about thirty square meters, and had the merit of being well lit. The Red Soul Spell was also gone.

Conversely, he found the design of this room strange. The entire wall section on his right had been replaced by dark metal bars, but a greenish force field shrouded what was on the other side.

Jake was becoming increasingly confused as the situation had already diverged from George's account. He and Brice had followed the 9 Zhorions closely at least up to the fourth hall. The creatures had only appeared afterwards.

As for him, he had crossed these monsters as early as the third hall. Why then? Recalling that George had also mentioned the random layout changes in the different rooms, his cousin had not necessarily lied.

The luminous arrows were still inscribed on one of the walls to show him the way, but he was stunned when he discovered that the arrow was pointing to the armored door behind him.

Apart from the bars and the impassable force field, there were no other doors. Regardless, Jake was in no hurry to return to the monster pit. His instinct was telling him that something was wrong with the room, but at least it was safe. For now anyway...

Although it was a waste of points, Jake let the excess Aether dissipate out of his body to relieve his growing headache. His healing powers declined markedly, but he immediately felt immense relief at his temples and forehead.

He allowed his back to slide on the floor against the armored door behind him and closed his eyes to rest for a short while. Feeling safe, he deployed his mental force throughout the entire room to perceive every detail and focused on his body's sensations to guide the healing more actively.

This time he had nowhere to bury himself, no warmth to speed his recovery, but he determined that this was as good a time as any to ingest the Blue Soul Stone that the Zhorion female warrior had exchanged with him.

Wvur vu vft àllaq̄aifout ovu Fiaroapq̄ frt Nfuypfo Somru, val gimmtiaru vft usmisut gw mru iusui. Dulnaou ovu mpozfeumpl nmjuz-pn ovfo oval vft easur vaq̄, ovu latu udduhol juzu rmo rueiaeagiu uaovuz. Waovmpo ovu piozfsamiuo zftafoamr, vu jmpit v̄fsu guur hmrlofroiw prtuz ovu ardipurhu md ovulu ojm uiuq̄urol frt jmpit huzofariw v̄fsu taut imre fem.

Last time he was unconscious when he digested these stones, but this time he was determined to witness the process. Sitting comfortably with his legs crossed, he gobbled down the Orxanium stone without faltering and it landed safely in his stomach, joining the liquid alloy lump that he was still unable to digest after all this time.

With a mixture of apprehension and excitement, Jake turned his senses on his stomach in anticipation of a miraculous response, but nothing happened. Like the liquid alloy piece, the Blue Soul Stone remained indifferent to his gastric juices.

He mused about this phenomenon for a brief moment and the only explanation he could think of was that the conditions were different compared to the last time. He had acted instinctively in his Berserk state back then, but Xi had told him that he had used the lava heat to induce the àssimilation.

Unfortunately having no external heat source with him, Jake chose to generate it himself. To put all the chances on his side, he waited patiently until his mind was perfectly rested and he spent again a few tens of thousands of Aether points to overload his stats.

With his mental and physical capacities boosted, he didn't waste a single second and stretched his Spirit Body all over the room to control and absorb a

maximum of Aether. With his Heat Control Skill he converted it into internal heat and directed it to his stomach.

His veins lit up like magma and his stomach also began to glow under his skin. The air around him swirled upwards due to the rise in temperature and the metal floor he was sitting on also began to emit a worrisome blue smoke as certain impurities were expelled from it.

For the first few minutes nothing happened, but about fifteen minutes later, when his digestive system reached its optimum temperature like a preheated oven, the Orxanium nugget suddenly melted.

Within seconds, it was done. In its liquid state, the Blue Soul Stone looked like a phosphorescent liquid sapphire and it quickly migrated into his duodenum and then to his small intestine where it was quickly absorbed.

Once the Orxanium passed into his bloodstream, the minerals dispersed throughout his body and were absorbed indiscriminately by his cells. At this microscopic scale, his Perception alone was no longer sufficient to monitor the situation and his Status took over to inform him in real time of what was happening inside him.

Ir ovu urt, ovu Mwzovfzafz gimmtiaru iasut pn om aol Gzftu 8 frt ovu àllaqaifoamr juro lqmmoviw. Nuaovuz val DNA rmz val Auovuzah Cmtu vft hvfreet, wuo usuzw huii ar val gmtw vft arouezfout oval ruj mzu arom ovuaz qmiuhpifz lozphopzul, fl ad val gmtw vft nzusampliw dprhoamrut jaovmpo ao tpu om f lvmzofeu md rpozauroi.

When the digestion ended, Jake methodically examined his physical and mental condition as well as his Status, but he found no noticeable change. His bloodline had not changed, but he could feel that there was something different about him, especially in his mood and mental clarity.

He felt more relaxed and rested.

He was about to interrupt his ultraviolet radiation to test his new Berserk mode when the sound of multiple gears rolling was heard.

Rumble!

The ground beneath his feet unexpectedly began to rock and the room spun around, accelerating briskly as if a giant was playing Rubik's cube. The floor and the ceiling reversed several times, until the room stabilized a few tens of seconds later.

The bars and the greenish field of light that had previously been on the right were now above him, and he stood on what was once the wall to his left. The previous doorway had disappeared, but a new one had appeared in front of him where previously there was nothing.

He had not yet fully appreciated this change that the armored door in front of him opened wide, and two individuals burst in before jointly closing the door behind them, combining their strengths as if their very lives depended on it.

BANG ! BANG ! BANG!

The hammerings coming from the other side struck repeatedly, forming bumps in the steel plating, then the impact sounds grew less frequent, until they ceased completely. A muffled roar resounded from the other side, but it soon became silent again.

Tvu ojm arbpzut artasatpfil juzu darfiw fgiu om ffbplo om ovuaz ruj
ursazmrquro frt talhmsuzut ovfo ovuw juzu rmo fimru ar oval zmmq.

Instantly, they became alert again, and a hostile atmosphere pervaded the room. Which was perfectly normal. For in front of Jake stood the Krish leader and Arrogant Warrior, the Krish having once hunted Tim and Sarah.