

# The Oracle Paths

## Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

### Chapter 341 - Solving The Maze (part 1)

‘How long was I unconscious?’ He asked, pressing his nostrils one by one with his fingertips to blow his nose. With his nose unclogged, he immediately felt much better.

[ Not long. About 3 minutes. ] Xi answered gently.

It was much shorter than he feared.

[I took the initiative to activate Alloy Coating to protect your brain before impact.] She explained calmly when she saw his incomprehension. [ Given the amount of metal circulating in your body, it was relatively simple. The monster’s mental wave was intercepted at more than 80%. It was all I could do in such a short time without a reliable Oracle Path.]

Jake reflected briefly on her explanation and nodded his head in approval.

‘Thank you Xi.’ He said with heartfelt gratitude. ‘If it happens again, don’t hesitate to take such initiatives of your own free will.’

[All right.]

Her voice sounded indifferent, but Jake could sense her immense relief.

Without her intervention, he might not have died, but several million Aether points had been consumed for this tiny Alloy Coating.

It was preposterous how expensive these Oracle Device skills were, but he was aware that the level of control and compression required to encapsulate his nerve cells with metal without damaging his body tissue was probably such that he might never be able to do it. At least not for a very long time.

‘Where are the two Krishs? ‘Jake worried again as he heard no noise from the other room where they had fled.

[Already far away, but I heard one of them screaming. They must have met with another mishap.]

Jake let out a cheerful chuckle, but their two names had not disappeared from the Player Rankings. He lost his good mood, however, when he discovered that Will’s name was nowhere to be found. He had expected this from the first trap, but it was extremely disheartening.

His comrade was indeed unlucky. His abilities might have shone in many circumstances, but here he was almost as helpless as a normal human. It was impossible for these Thralls to give in to his charisma when they were probably already under someone’s control.

As a precaution, Jake overloaded his Aether stats for the third time in a row and examined the corpse of the creature at his feet. The first thing that caught his attention were the nasty scars zebraizing the surface of the creature’s dark, hairless skin. The alien had likely been tortured.

A scan surprisingly revealed that the monster was apparently not a Thrall, but a Zhorion prisoner named Keshom. His species was preceded in the report by the mention ‘Corrupted’. A rusty metal chain from which hung a bronze plaque with inscriptions hugged the monster’s neck, sinking several millimeters into its flesh.

Perhaps an identification number and presumably the alien’s name in its native language or that of its jailers. By comparing the symbols with those of the Zhorion grimoires he had in his database, he was able to confirm that it was a different language.

Increasingly perplexed, Jake slowly began to sense that this last test was not so simple. The Phantom Sanctuary was supposed to be some kind of sacred

place for the Zhorions and the few Players who managed to enter it, but why did it look more like a prison ?

Ao dazlo, vu vft ovmpervo ovfo ovu ifgwzarov frt fii ovmlu ozfnl juzu f jfw om oulo ovuQ mru iflo oaQu, gpo ovu jvmiu nahopzu jfl nzmfggiw Qmzu lmnvaloahfout.

Gurgle!

‘Ugh...’ Jake grunted when he heard his stomach rumbling with hunger.

By activating Bloodline Ignition, his body had shed another 50 kilos. His proud stature was not much larger than that of a plucked eagle and the weight of the alloy in his body was felt all the more. Standing had become painfully taxing, his wobbly legs almost failing him.

[ Eat Keshom.] Xi coldly urged as he wondered how to remedy the problem.

Jake shuddered at the thought, but he soon forgot his moral preconceptions when his stomach rumbled again. To survive, he might even be able to eat another human. Especially if that person had tried to kill him. This Keshom had gone mad long ago and could no longer be considered an intelligent life form with sensitivity.

Pressed by time, he raised his hands and generated an intense field of hot air to meticulously cook the creature. He hoped that this way the alien would not taste too bad. Alas, the monster’s roasted meat turned out to be disgusting.

It took Jake long minutes to devour half of the monster and by preheating his digestive system he was able to assimilate the nutrients in no time whatsoever. The longest part was spent chewing and in the end he just swallowed while suppressing his urge to vomit.

Morally, although he was full, he was sickened by his deed. Nevertheless, his body ballooning at a glance made him forget his grievances. Here, it was the Law of the Jungle that prevailed over everything else.

About an hour later, all that remained were the bones of Keshom and the offal that Jake hadn't deigned to eat. The Zhorion's body contained traces of Flintium, Orxanium, and Naequat, but his cells were already saturated with those minerals.

Irlouft md guare àllaQaifout fl gudmzu, ovuw hmroarput om hazhpifou nfflasuiw ar val gimmt sulluil. Oovuz ovfr dmzhare vaQ om liaevoiww arhzuflu ovu mponpo md piozfsamiuo zftafoamr, ovuzu juzu rm ofreagiu gurudaol.

By the time Jake regained his strength, the labyrinth's conformation had changed six times and Brice had finally died, whether from his injuries or otherwise.

Just as he was about to resume his exploration, Enya's name also disappeared from the Player Ranking, brutally awakening his pessimism. Thanks to Hakkrasha, he had thought she would have nothing to fear, but obviously he was wrong again.

He was now the only human from his original group still in the running. Counting Ruby, Craig, Xiaoming, George and the other human Enya seemed to know, they were now only six. Of the other Players, only Bawopi, Hakkrasha and the two Krishs were still alive.

Before leaving, Jake temporarily turned on his Berserk mode and used it to try to melt the bars separating him from the mass of greenish light, but he soon gave up. While the so-called armored doors, including the walls, were relatively destructible, the bars were not affected by his efforts, and the metal in them remained perfectly tepid in contact with his Aether.

Out of curiosity, Jake took the opportunity to throw a Red Soul Stone through the bars. Prepared for the worst, he hid hastily behind the armored door leading into a new room in anticipation of a huge explosion or worse, but to no avail.

Hearing no suspicious noises, he entered the previous room again, quickly closing the door behind him and noticed that the greenish light field had shortly changed color, turning abruptly to vermilion red.

However, a few seconds later, the light reverted back to its previous color and Jake found that the Red Soul Stone he had thrown there was missing altogether. Whatever that force field was, it was impassable. Firing a few ultraviolet lasers didn't make any difference either. On the contrary, the greenish radiation intensified violently in response.

The bars being impossible to melt, he scraped the metal covering the walls to make himself a new sword. Fighting with his claws was too limited in the face of these over-armed Zhorions and Players.

His Earth Control didn't enable him to finely manipulate metal, but with his telekinesis and enough heat he could perform more or less the same feat.

In a few minutes, his armor was restored and a thick splitter about a meter and a half long took shape. He did not dare to make a larger weapon because of the limited size of most of the labyrinth's halls.

Jake then injected the Grey Aether into it at the cost of a few more points and once he was satisfied, he set off. With his armor intact and a real weapon in his hand, he immediately felt more confident.

The room next door was quite ordinary, but much more spacious. No traps seemed to be hidden there, but there were several doors, one of them forming a trap door in the ceiling. He had long understood that rooms could change orientation, so he was not upset.

As he explored the new hall, he realized that three of the four doors were already half-open and that the light arrows pointed only to one of them. The hatch in the ceiling was still locked and for the first time he discovered that the sacrifice of a Soul Stone was required to open it.

Of the three doors already open, two were plunged into darkness, while the third seemed to have been the focus of a terrible battle. The walls and ceiling were covered with ice, while in some places the walls had completely melted, revealing directly the gears and sometimes the void separating two neighboring rooms.

Over the next few hours, Jake continued to explore room after room, coming close to death on several occasions. He came across no one except for the Thralls, which were in some of the darker rooms.

Rooms containing prisoners like Keshom were rare, but there were still enough of them to make exploration terribly difficult. Like the two Krishs before him, whenever he came across such a creature, he would promptly seek refuge in a well-lit room.

Fortunately, once armed with a decent sword, Jake was no longer fooled. Taking advantage of the creatures' stupidity, and by finely manipulating his Aether, he could deliver devastating death blows without breaking a sweat. The only precaution he had to take was to never get cornered.