

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 346 - Welcome, Jake

Based on his understanding of the labyrinth, Jake flew directly towards the green light glittering in the darkness like a dying star lost in the firmament. During his journey, his hearing was frequently subjected to the incessant din of ceaselessly operating cogs, pistons and gears.

From time to time, short psychedelic light impulses would travel across the wall surfaces of the various structures, forming a network with mysterious functions.

Sometimes, as he brushed past a cubic room whose walls had been damaged by previous battles, the animal grunts of the Thralls and prisoners inside would reach his ears. Each time, he would accelerate sharply to get away as quickly as possible for fear of being spotted. Who knew what the current Thralls were capable of?

To reach the emerald field of light took him a considerable time, much more than what his holographic model had calculated. The labyrinth was larger than his boldest estimates suggested. There was a magic at work here that was beyond him.

Nonetheless, a few hours later, Jake reached his destination safely, the greenish field of light stretching magnificently before him, bathing him in its spectral radiance.

Jake could not help but be amazed at how easily he had been able to travel through the maze's interstices. It was a relatively simple loophole to exploit for anyone who could fly. He found it hard to believe that such an obvious

means of cheating had been so openly left at their disposal. It was as if they were encouraged to disregard the rules, ignoring common sense.

At the time of their arrival, the walls were still brittle and quite a few contestants might have been able to crush these walls to dust. If they had chosen not to go through the doors, they probably could have found the central room without having to face all these dangers.

This new realization only strengthened his resolve to carry on with his plan to the end.

When Jake had just floated a few meters from the light structure, the creaking of the gears resonated again in the darkness and the greenish force field began to move at very high speed, as did the other cubic and rectangular rooms filling the void.

In order not to be left behind, Jake tried to keep as close as possible to the luminous mass, but in doing so he nearly died several times, almost suffering a heart attack from the fright caused by the walls of the various halls cutting through the void like silent asteroids travelling along a well-defined trajectory.

By the time the maze stabilized again, Jake had deviated several kilometers from his intended destination. Undeterred, he adjusted his flight and caught up with the light field that had left him far behind.

Once in front, Jake swiftly swirled around, levitating in search of the wall of the central room that he had partially destroyed during his convalescence. After a few minutes, he was relieved to find the hole in question, and he crept in without loitering.

Waovmpo jfloare f lareiu Smpi Somru, vu vft qfrfeut om zuopzr om f nifhu ovfo rm mru gpo vaqluid, f duj Zvmzamrl frt nmlagiw Rpgw vft ozmttur.

But Jake wasn't there to open the door. Even if he had owned hundreds of Soul Stones, he wouldn't have taken that risk. On the one hand because the

sockets were now so wide that a thousand Soul Stones of each type would not have been enough to activate the door, and on the other hand because until proven otherwise, everyone who had attempted it was dead.

The only reason Jake had come back here was to check one thing. With a somber expression on his face, he inspected every nook and cranny of the hall, especially the blood covering the floor, the ceiling and the large gate.

The three small doors leading to other halls were spotless, the gray metal cladding covering them remaining immaculate and sparkling. Clearly, none of these Zhorions had made it this far.

Using a scan and Xi's expertise, Jake slowly reconstructed what he thought was a fairly accurate version of the facts.

All of a sudden, Jake walked stiffly into a corner of the hall, about seven meters away from the main door. This was where the blood trail ended. He then squatted down and gently gazed at the metal surface, scraping some of the dried blood there with his telekinesis.

He remained frozen in the same posture for a long time after that, lost in his reflections. Except for Xi, who shared his thoughts, his face betrayed no emotion.

'This is where she died.' Xi's hologram said coldly as it materialized beside him.

'Hmmm.' Jake nodded his head a few seconds later as he got up. 'As I feared, this gate is a decoy. Opening it leads to death. These luminous arrows were only there to deceive our vigilance by giving us a false lead.'

'The Zhorions also died when they opened the door.' Xi confirmed with a grave face. 'According to the traces of blood, footprints and fingerprints, as well as the intact condition of this hall, none of them had the time or

possibility to resist. Ruby got what she deserved. Indirectly, she has done you a great service, although I doubt that was her intention... ‘

Jake could sense Xi's contempt and resentment for the young woman and he shared that feeling. On the inside, he was quite pleased with her fate. Perhaps karma existed.

And yet he was not that happy. Deep down he felt quite empty. Chasing these toxic thoughts out of his mind, he focused his attention on the greenish force field instead. The moment of truth had come. It was time for him to commit suicide...

‘Are you sure of your plan? ‘Xi tried to convince him to give up for the hundredth time in a row.

‘Absolutely not! ‘Jake laughed wryly. ‘But by elimination, it's the most counter-intuitive action we've had at our disposal and in front of us from the beginning. It still fits in with the principle that the destination is behind that door. By following this precept, the luminous arrows would not have lied either.’

‘What if you die? The Oracle System does not encourage suicide. It will affect your rating. ‘Xi warned him.

‘If I don't do anything, I'll die anyway. In that case, I might as well satisfy my curiosity. Even if I managed to escape from here, there is only the sidereal void of System A0 waiting for me. I have already explored most of the rooms of this maze and I am almost certain that there are no secret chambers hidden there. I have no food, no water and after all this time the Oracle has not recalled my body to the Red Cube, as if it longs to see me die of thirst and hunger. After the vicious blow the Oracle System has just dealt me, I have no reason to follow the script he has planned for all of us. To date, it is by thinking outside the box that I have been able to get this far and I intend to continue to do so. Whatever happens, I have no regrets.’

‘Sigh, all right then. Do as you see fit.’ Xi pouted, giving up any hope of convincing that stubborn fool.

A while later, Jake was standing inches away from the luminous force field. His breath gradually quickened as the jitters rose inside him. Despite his apparent confidence, he was not serene at all. No matter what he had told Xi, it strongly resembled suicide.

To reinforce his determination, Jake mentally replayed the scene of the Flintium Stone he had thrown in there, counting the seconds it had taken for the Red Soul Stone to dissolve.

It wasn’t instantaneous! It was the only certainty he needed to rekindle his resolve. His stomach was also able to digest these minerals. Even if this force field turned out to be an overpowering Green Soul Spell, his goal was not to petrify himself to death inside.

Jfcu vft hazhiut ovu dmzhu dauit jvur vu fzzasut. Hu vft f suzw nzuhalu atuf md aol taqurlamrl. A hpgu fgmpo f vprtzut quouzl lypfzu. Id ovuzu jfl rm movuz qfeah fo jmzc, vu mriw vft om hzmlf f duj tmxur quouzl om zufhv, ad ao ukalout, ovu darfi zmmq vattur arlatu.

Taking a deep breath, Jake activated Bloodline Ignition and extinguished the intense ultraviolet radiation repressing the three minerals contained in his cells. His appearance immediately shifted from that of a tall and handsome man, albeit a little too muscular, to that of a demon with long fangs and claws crisscrossed with lava veins whose eyes and hair were bathed in a wondrous light.

His body was already extremely lanky and armless, so Jake did not waste the small window of action at his disposal. He stepped back to gain some momentum, then sprinted forward into the field of light, magnifying his movements with intense telekinetic impulses.

A shock wave exploded behind him as his body broke through the sound barrier a few milliseconds before disappearing into the ocean of light.

Once inside, Jake was immediately assaulted by overwhelming energy. His mind was instantly placated by the influence of an almighty Green Soul Spell, and he felt such a plenitude that his body halted all movement, floating statically suspended within the light only a few meters away from the previous hall. His determination, so great a second earlier, seemed to have vanished.

But a few seconds later, as his Spirit Body and skin surface began to crystallize and his mind grew increasingly numb, Green Soul Energy reached the core of his cells, coming into contact with the Flintium, Orxanium and Naequat ores.

As if a can of gasoline in contact with a flame, a geyser of tumultuous energy erupted from the depths of Jake's cells, and for an infinitesimal amount of time, his bloodline and psychic faculties were amplified over a million times.

What he experienced at that very moment was so extraordinary, that he felt the fleeting, but very much alive feeling of being almost omnipotent. With one thought, he could have incinerated the Phantom Sanctuary and the even more gigantic spaceship to which it was anchored. With another thought, he could have generated a gravity so powerful that the entire Earth would have been compressed into a grain of sand. Everything he had experienced in his life since birth, all the things he thought he had forgotten or did not understand, finally made sense.

And with another thought, he also felt the Aether thousands of kilometers away. These thoughts seemed dissociated, but they all took place at the same time, lost in a split instant where time no longer existed.

Then time resumed its course. His body was consumed in one Planck time (10^{-43} sec), and Jake understood that he was about to die for good.

Taking advantage of this moment of unparalleled mental clarity, he sucked up all the Aether that his Spirit Body could reach, sending it directly to his Aether Core.

Jplo fl val iflo rupzmr jfl fgmpo om hmiifnlu frt vu uknuhout om dart ovu zuflpzare tfzcrull md ovu Rut Cpgu, ovu jmzit Qazfhpimpliw lofgaixut frt fr flomralvare salamr prdmitut gudmzu val flomralvut uwul.

In a dark room, dimly lit by phosphorescent crystals hanging on the walls, three individuals stood calmly in front of him with different expressions, but what they all had in common was that none of them were surprised to see him.

‘Welcome, Jake.’

At right, Jake recognized the massive bronze silhouette of Hakkrasha who appeared to be sleeping standing. At left, one of the nine Zhorions was watching him with curiosity. In the center, an old Zhorion with silver hair and eyes wearing a long dark robe smiled at him with a friendly expression.

It was this person who had just spoken, and Jake recognized the artificial voice that had announced the results of all the trials so far. Except that it had now lost its monotone pitch and had regained the depth and nuance that the voice of an extremely ancient living being was supposed to have.

In disbelief, Jake squinted his eyes, staring intently at the old man’s face as he thought of a possibility. Faced with his reaction, the old Zhorion chuckled elegantly, visibly accustomed to this kind of attitude.

‘Your deduction is indeed correct, Jake. Let me introduce myself first. My name is Xion Zolvhur, but you may know me better as the Ancient Designer.’