

The Oracle Paths

Volume 5: The Last Tutorial

Chapter 515 - Make Me

‘If you want to leave this place you know what you have to do, hehe. Bhuzkoc is getting impatient.’

Jake picked up some conversation as he nonchalantly walked among all the poor people, most of whom were living in their own feces and detritus. The more fortunate ones sometimes had a tent or mattress for shelter and rest, but the smells of urine, sweat and other bodily fluids were so strong that it almost brought tears to his eyes.

Those who had been trapped here for a long time seemed to have grown numb to this misery, but passing Evolvers like him reacted the same way, if they were not outright wearing a filter mask to ward off this olfactory torture. In particular, a huge, hairless canine alien walking by a few feet away had such a keen sense of smell that his entire head was concealed under a custom-made gas mask.

The alien that had just spoken was a savage of about 3 meters in height and sported a repulsive pig-like face with long incisors protruding from its upper lip that prevented it from articulating properly. His skin was pale and covered with strange orange boils that emitted a foul smell. Because of his long incisors, his speech was somewhat comical in spite of his resolutely threatening style, but none of his interlocutors dared to give him the slightest nag. They were too terrified and distressed to try anything.

The group consisted of three humans, four other humanoids, and a six-legged creature that looked vaguely like a cross between a bison and a horse, except that its fur was a bright yellow.

Among the three humans, there was a balding, emaciated man in his fifties, as well as a young woman barely of age and a boy about twelve years old slightly better fed. Not looking alike, they were not necessarily from the same family, but circumstances had brought them together for better or for worse.

Right now, it was mostly for worse.

‘Grosh, I beg of you. Ask me anything else you want, but not that.’ The balding man prostrated himself on the floor, clutching tightly at the stalker alien’s pants.

His sobs soon dripped onto the latter’s clawed feet and the pig-like humanoid began to grunt grimly without hiding any of his revulsion. If it wasn’t for the rule against using violence, he would have broken a leg or two of this loser a long time ago! Because of these stupid rules, these vermin were getting a little too confident and showing a courage they would never normally have.

Jerking his leg away from the human clutching his pants, Grosh sneered with contempt, then scolded loudly,

‘You have until tomorrow to sign the Slave Contract if you want enough Aether to leave this place. After that, you will become servants of Bhuzkoc. If signing a contract with him frightens you, you can also sign it with me. I promise, I will take good care of you...’

As he said these last words, he leered lewdly at the girl, which chilled them all. Even Jake, who was neutrally watching the scene, frowned slightly. This alien wasn’t even human, but that didn’t stop

him from wanting to fornicate with species radically different from his own.

On Earth, he would have been considered pansexual, but with his hideous appearance and attitude it was a safe bet that he was simply a sadistic degenerate capable of copulating with anything that had a hole in it.

Maybe because of her terror, but at that moment the young woman being ogled like a piece of meat by the alien made a critical mistake. She cringed, openly showing her disgust.

One might have expected this alien to be poorly versed in human expression, but it turned out to have quite a decent emotional intelligence. As he became aware of the disgust the young woman was feeling as she looked at him, a murderous glint flashed in his piggy little eyes.

Because of this reaction, his soft ego took a hit and his whole disposition changed drastically. From a simple bully playing his role as Bhuzkoc's proxy, the matter suddenly became personal.

'Ah, I was wrong!' The alien suddenly exclaimed with a theatrical air that was hardly believable. 'It's not a day, but an hour you have left to sign the Slave Contract. How stupid of me, haha... If you refuse again by then, you will stay here. Who knows, maybe you'll find some balls and face death head on when it comes. Hahaha!'

The pig-like alien then waddled away with a proud splay-footed gait befitting his natural grace: nonexistent. As luck would have it, Jake happened to be on his path. Upon spotting the unfamiliar figure in front of him, Grosh immediately acted like his usual self: Like a prick.

‘Ugh? Who the fućk are you? Who do you serve, motherfucker? Bhuzkoc? Shaktilar? Melkree? If you don’t want to become an enemy of the great Grosh, you’d better get out of my way.’

Jake stood still, staring at him with a straight face. He memorized the other two names he was hearing for the first time and assumed they were probably two other local tyrants competing with Bhuzkoc.

‘Hey, are you deaf? I said shoo!’ Grosh yelled again as he found that he had been completely ignored.

‘Make me.’ Jake snorted as he stared uncaringly at his bracelet.

‘What did you say?’ The alien was so shocked that he wasn’t sure he heard correctly.

‘You heard me right. If you want me to move, make me. Otherwise, fućk off.’

‘Hmmmph! I’ll remember that! If I run into you outside, I hope you’ll be able to keep the same arrogance when I kill you.’

‘Whatever you say.’ Jake yawned mockingly.

In the end, the alien didn’t take the bait. Despite his bad temper, he knew the Shelter’s rules well and knew when it wasn’t worth it. He had seen what happened when someone broke the rules.

The Oracle Drones would swarm down on the criminal to neutralize him and carry out their sentence. Whether it was simple violence, ****, or murder, the sentence was always the same: a considerable fine in Aether and a reduction in experience from their Oracle Rank gauge.

If the victim suffered injuries as minor as a small bruise or scratch, the culprit could be charged up to 100,000 points the first time. Of course, for some behemoths 100,000 points was nothing compared to

their wealth. That's why the Oracle introduced an additional measure.

After a first offence, the price of the fines would double and so on after each additional offence. Murder, **** and other more serious crimes were by default set at 10M Aether points when the victim was of no importance, but this sum could quickly rise to exorbitant levels if the target was an influential person with a high Oracle Rank or a special position.

But then again, 10M Aether points were a minor sum for Evolvers and Players of sufficient power and prestige. The real reason almost no one committed murder was because raping, robbing, or killing someone in an Oracle City or Shelter always resulted in the demotion of one or more Oracle Ranks.

The loss of experience was easy to make up for in the lower ranks, but it quickly became a nightmare after rank 6 or 7. Unless they were completely stupid, no criminal, not even the worst psychopath, would make that mistake.

The last parameter to consider was the Oracle System's predictive ability. Every individual wearing an Oracle Device was part of a closed deterministic system and therefore the vast majority of these potential crimes simply could not happen.

Long before a potential criminal acted, and sometimes even before the intention arose, he would be stopped by Oracle Drones or an Oracle Guardian if necessary.

That, however, remained in theory. In practice, although incidents were rare, they could happen exceptionally.

First of all, the Oracle Drones were not invincible, far from it. As the Evolvers advanced, it would become increasingly difficult for these Oracle Drones to ensure the residents' safety.

The second crucial point was that Oracle Guardians were a rather valuable resource. Most of them were on the front lines in older systems dealing with Digestors and it was generally a waste of their potential to use them to settle these minor conflicts.

That's why sometimes a crime might actually happen. The probability was ridiculously low, but not zero, and no one wanted to test the limits of their luck to find out. The sentence resulting from the crime, on the other hand, was irrevocable and instantly deducted from the culprits' bracelet.

The most exciting part was when the criminals were unable to pay their fine. The required Aether would then be taken directly from their body, Spirit Body and Soul. If the convict was too weak to withstand the treatment, he or she could literally disintegrate, their entire body reverting to Aether.

Compared to this Grosh, Jake wasn't very familiar with all these subtleties in the rules, but he didn't feel like testing them. He did, however, have one deeply held belief and that was that each individual had an inherent value in the eyes of the Oracle.

The treatment of a criminal, in his opinion, could vary greatly from one criminal to another depending on their respective crime, their victim, their Oracle Rank and many other factors. The only thing to hope for was to be in the Oracle's good books. And on that matter, Jake wasn't very confident...

After Grosh left, Jake examined the 8 refugees, and especially the three humans, before making up his mind to approach them. The

three humans had also noticed him after his short altercation with the pigfaced alien and were now staring at him with wariness.

The time had come to ask them why they were so desperate and in such a rush to get out of here.