

The Oracle Paths

Volume 2: The First Ordeal

Chapter 62 - Transaction

After his lightning victory, the encampments around the Red Cube regained their tranquillity. Jake's group feasted copiously, with the initial core following Jake consuming some Digestor meat and Pink potatoes, while the Playboy and his groupies had to make do with canned food.

No one complained, but you could smell the resentment and bitterness in Sarah and Kyle. Yet, in the face of their previous disappointments, the two swallowed their saliva rather than make a scene.

From time to time, Jake would catch curious glances from other factions, especially in relation to silver meat. But he showed a similar curiosity, and discovered to his surprise that many humanoid species dined on similar meat, sometimes with fruits and vegetables he had never seen before.

Because of the cyan salt as far as the eye could see, there was no source of wood available, and so, in order to save electric torches or torches for the more primitive ones, the majority went to bed immediately after the end of the dinner.

As promised, Jake left the tent to the child and his mother. As there was still room inside, he also let Loana sleep with them, since the poor girl had not fully recovered from the loss of her fingers. At least mentally, that would leave after-effects.

As for the others, although they wanted to spend a good night in the tent, they grinned and bore it patiently, aware that complaining for such a futile reason would be the best way to discredit themselves.

The sad reality was that the mild temperatures of the day were rapidly dropping once night fell, and enjoying a good night's restorative sleep would be impossible in the open air.

When there was no choice, however, most people often proved to be far more resourceful than they thought they were capable of, and Jake's group was no exception.

Kyle, aka the Playboy, offered his groupies to sleep together so they could keep warm, which they gladly accepted, Sarah included. Amy and Will didn't know how to behave in this situation, and Kyle didn't dare make the same offer.

By looking at Jake's expression, they could confirm that Jake had no intention of sleeping and that they were free to do whatever they wanted. Will, who was not born yesterday, read more about their current situation and decided that he would keep Jake company during his wake.

To top it all off, the night sky was getting cloudy. The purple moonbeams and the brightness of the stars were no longer enough to see properly.

This made a perfect hunting ground for all these night vision capable life forms and Jake could see many eyes shining in different colours in the darkness. If he couldn't see much, chances were that most of the humans from the other factions couldn't either.

The most frustrating thing was that his Aether Perception stat peaked at 10.5 points, hardly more than a normal Earth human. With his 11.6 pts of Body Perception stat, he ended up seeing only a pittance better than the others. There was no way he could react if

another group was plotting against them and took the initiative to strike them down.

When it was nearly midnight, and the rest of his group was long asleep with the exception of Will, who was watching next to him, they heard a rustle of dress nearby. Alert, they both drew their machete and saber, and then relaxed, realizing that this was only one of the noblewomen of the medieval human faction.

She was one of two pink-haired beauties wearing a long scarlet satin dress. With the drop in temperature, a black fur coat from an unidentified beast now covered her shoulders.

Now that they were looking at her more closely, Jake and Will swallowed with difficulty, their throats suddenly dry. The young woman in front of them was a genuine goddess.

Only five feet tall and not more than twenty years old, she emanated an aura of charisma and dominance difficult to imagine coming from such a tiny woman. With the ambient darkness, the golden glitter covering her crystal-clear skin gave her an almost sacred halo.

Her long pink hair reaching to her waist emitted a faint light, as did her irises, also pink. It was the first time Jake and Will had ever seen such a colour in someone's eyes, and they couldn't help but be captivated by her charming, seemingly innocent look.

To complete the picture, a white gold tiara with the pattern of two symmetrical crescent moons joined at their ends repeated itself, the empty space between the two moons in the centre of her forehead set with a ruby the size of a pigeon's egg. An undeniable sign of royalty, which seemed universal whatever one's world of origin.

Jake realized, however, that this was just a preconception. He only had to look at the other humanoid aliens around the Red Cube to realize that it wasn't always clear who had the authority.

For many animals, whether they were of Earth origin or not, there was the typical 'might makes right' attitude among them. The strongest and most intelligent were in most cases easy to identify.

For other humanoid aliens, however, it was a completely different matter. With these species of scaled minotaurs for example, was it the smaller one with long horns, or the larger one without horns that led the horde? Or maybe the medium sized one with milky white scales?

Other creatures looked exactly the same for his untrained eyes. One such life form, for example, had its chitin covered with patches of various colors that seemed painted and unnatural. The only distinguishing feature he could think of was their number, but as far as he knew, it may only be a typical fashion of theirs.

Turning his attention to the noblewoman in front of him, he noticed that she was accompanied by four royal guards, those who protected the group of aristocrats. Each of them had a watchful gaze and were monitoring his movements, especially the pistol at his belt.

'Halt!' Jake waved to stop ten feet away. 'What can I do for you, my lady?'

Jake was as antisocial as ever, but the exercises with the Oracle, the increase in his intelligence and reaction time, and his lack of stage fright since he'd absorbed a Digestor, helped make him serene and confident.

Now that he was no longer influenced by his social anxiety, he was no longer afraid to stare at Strangers, and therefore read their expressions much more easily.

‘Ele veleis boljas cuis harmita.’ The beauty declared, pointing the gun at his waist.

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Jake flinched, trying to maintain his indifference, but his eyes full of envy betrayed how tempted he was. He was torn between the idea of getting a bunch of Aether immediately at the price of a gun he would sooner or later run out of bullets with, or playing it safe.

The truth was that, even though everyone was unaware of it, he still had two spare guns, at least two boxes of 9mm ammunition and an assault rifle that he was saving for really dangerous situations. He could perfectly afford to sell one.

The problem was not losing a gun, but the fact that everyone would realize in the morning when they saw the young woman with her new gun that he had enough firearms to make a transaction.

It meant extra attention that he didn't need. On the other hand, he could effectively do without this weapon and a gain of Aether would instantly boost his chances of survival.

Never one to run away from a little bit of trouble, he made his decision quickly. Calmly and attempting to assume his best poker face, he raised three fingers and pointed to the full purse with his other hand.

No matter how many crystals were in that purse, he wanted triple! With his IQ, even without ever having negotiated with anyone, he knew that Aether was the most precious resource on this planet. And if that person was willing to buy his gun for that purse, well, she had to have a lot more.

The young noblewoman gritted her teeth in frustration. Contrary to what Jake thought, the young lady didn't seem accustomed to dealing with the likes of him. Perhaps her servants had always dealt with this kind of work before, or she was so rich that she had never needed to cut a price.

What Jake didn't know was that the young woman and her sister, along with the entire group of nobles had been tortured by tremendous anguish since their arrival on B842. The cohesion of their group was on the verge of explosion.

Here, on this planet, their magic was not working.