

The Oracle Paths

Volume 2: The First Ordeal

Chapter 68 – Femme fatale

Several minutes after the alien leapt in pursuit and the sounds of gunfire became distant, only then did Jake dare to stop faking his death. Cautiously, he slowly got up and looked around.

A few meters behind the tent, the bald white man in sunglasses was living his last moments. After being blown into the air by such a monster, the bones of his body were broken through and through, and he suffered a lot of internal bleeding.

To Jake's surprise, the alien had ignored the dying prey, preferring to pursue the two faster leaders who had escaped first. Which made no sense to him. The only reason to hunt other creatures besides food was to steal resources or acquire Aether. Any other reason wasn't rational.

As ferocious as this alien may seem, its equipment, strength and technology was a sign of a highly evolved and technologically advanced extraterrestrial species. In other words, if the two mercenaries didn't have anything special on them, it meant that the creature was hunting them for sport.

If Jake pushed the reasoning further, it meant that by attacking the humans without a faction that night, they had drawn attention to them from these aliens, which would never have happened if they had stayed warm and cozy in their camp.

Earlier in the day when they arrived at the foot of the Red Cube, Jake had sensed hostile glances as he executed the primitive alien human who had challenged him to a duel. Perhaps if he had shown more direct physical and martial prowess, instead of relying on the advantage of his gun, he would have been the one attacked that night.

Just thinking about it, he was shivering. He was also certain about another detail. This alien didn't have that much Aether. He couldn't verify it, but his instincts told him that somehow the body of this humanoid was simply monstrously superior to them.

Jake hadn't forgotten the crucial information about his body status that loudly proclaimed 'Inferior humanoid specie'. As time went by, he relied more on his Aether Status, which reflected the overall amplification of his stats compared to the normal human.

Body Status was different, since it depended on the genetic code and the laws of physics. Training physically or mentally, for example, could not improve the speed of reaction beyond a certain limit.

In other words, the perception of time was the same for everyone, more or less. (Bonus info: children see time passing in slow motion 1.1 times slower than adults. Elderly people process information more slowly and see time passing faster). What changed in top athletes, or martial artists, were the reflexes. Reflexes were programmed to respond to situations without going through the conscious brain.

This meant that no matter how much Agility or Intelligence the Body Status showed, its reaction speed would not change or would change only slightly. At least as long as he was human.

If this alien had a body ten times stronger than a human, titanium bones, metal fibers for muscle, and a brain calculating faster than a supercomputer; then with only 10 points of Aether he could pulverize a human with several times the amount of Aether.

It was a fundamental boundary separating two species at different evolutionary levels. Something impossible to overcome unless the Aether advantage became overwhelming or somehow we could evolve beyond human genetic limits.

In any case, concern about this issue in the present situation was futile. Dealing with and solving problems one by one as they arise was Jake's new motto. And for a renowned former procrastinator like him, it was no small feat.

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That meant that this man was as strong as a rank 3 theoretical Digestor. No wonder he survived a percussion like that. If Jake had gotten him to drink Digestor blood, he might even have made it out alive. He suspected the leaders of this mercenary group had monopolized the Aether, forbidding their men to absorb it directly from their victims.

It was the only logical way to explain how such stats were possible. Unless, of course, they fought to the death against an army of monsters. But if that was the case, Jake was certain they would never have gotten away with it. Their firearms were sorely lacking in numbers,

The last possibility was that the group of criminals had many more men in the beginning and that the dead had allowed the living to

evolve faster. A mass execution was not impossible either. If Jake, Amy and Will could settle for farm animals, so why not these criminals on their fellow humans.

Satisfied, Jake cautiously entered the tent to find a disoriented Amy, slowly coming to her senses. When she saw his face in the light of the flash of the smartphone still on in the pavilion, she immediately covered her private parts with a cute cry of panic.

‘What the hell happened?’ She said, trying to recall the events. ‘I remember trying to defend the kid, nothing after that.’

‘Well, basically you got knocked out, then brought in here and stripped like all the other women camped out next to us.’ Jake explained. ‘The majority of the men were either severely injured or killed. The kid’s okay, but he took a pretty good blow to the head.’

‘Oh, that’s good to hear.’ Amy breathed a sigh of relief. ‘Can I have my clothes?’

Jake realized the kidnapped women’s clothes were indeed in the pavilion next to the mercenaries’ loot. Also present were the backpacks of supplies that had been stolen from them. Gentleman, but unable to recognize her clothes amidst the pile, he gave her some privacy and decided to turn around.

This didn’t stop him from asking a few questions to save time, which made the young woman extremely uncomfortable about having to change a few meters away from a man who could turn around at the slightest pretext.

She had been unconscious, but had apparently come to her senses several minutes ago, feigning unconsciousness to avoid drawing attention to herself. Sure enough, Jake and Kyle weren’t the only Oscar-winning actors tonight.

‘Sarah? I don’t know either. I was already unconscious. I heard their leader jokingly mention a guy named Joey who had gone to taste the quality of tonight’s loot. Apparently they were unhappy that he’d gone off to have fun without them. If that’s Sarah, you’ve got to save her right now!’

Jake frowned, baffled by her reaction. Even this morning, they seemed to hate each other. Maybe there was some kind of universal female solidarity about these things.

‘All right, I will.’ He promised. ‘But there’s one person no one told me about tonight. Where’s the kid’s mother?’

Remembering something, Amy’s face decayed from grief. Jake knew right away that something terrible had happened.

‘When they attacked us and knocked the kid out, she went crazy. Halfway to their camp, one of the guys hit her on the head with a bat, and she didn’t get up after that. There was blood everywhere... I think she’s dead. I got knocked out right after that.’

Jake closed his eyes for a moment and massaged his temples. It was his second failure of the evening. The first was being shot like a rookie. The second was that he couldn’t save that woman in time, leaving a kid an orphan.

Nevertheless, it was time to move on. He had done his best and he didn’t owe these people anything. He would do his best to save Sarah, even though it was probably already too late.

Once Amy was dressed, he entrusted her with their provisions, the poor young woman disappearing almost completely under all the bags. Her Frenzy Skill was still active under stress, and she managed to carry everything as best she could.

He showed her the position of their camp before separating at the entrance to the pavilion. The camp was in turmoil. The appearance of the alien and the gunfire had driven everyone away, prisoners and criminals alike. It was silent and empty now.

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The body of a nàkéd man lay nearby, drained of blood by multiple stab wounds. Opposite, a Sarah sitting in shock, her knees bent against her chést held a military knife, probably snatched from her victim, with a ferocious beastly expression on her face.

He couldn't tell if the mercenary had managed to dip his biscuit, but for sure it didn't end well for him. He was discovering Sarah in a new light tonight. The woman had character.
