

The Oracle Paths

Volume 2: The First Ordeal

Chapter 70 - The opening of the Red Cube

The piercing sound, like a war siren, echoed to the edge of the dunes, awakening all life forms potentially asleep within a hundred miles. Jake's group was no exception.

Sadly, the child had also woken up. Given the circumstances, it might have been better if he had remained dormant. His first instinct was to ask where his mother was. None of the girls found the courage to tell him the disastrous truth.

Unfortunately, the more they tried to keep him in the dark, the more agitated the child became, searching for his mother all around the camp. Weary and tired, Jake walked with a heavy step to the child, knelt down and hugged him.

'I'm sorry,' He said, apologizing with a neutral, uncompassionate expression... 'It was already too late for your mother, but she didn't suffer.'

Having himself lost his own parents twenty-two years ago in the False 3rd World War, he knew that beating around the bush wouldn't do the child any good. On a planet where all kinds of aliens and Digestors wanted to kill or devour them, preserving his naiveté was as good as a death sentence.

If he could recover and move on, he would have a much better chance of surviving despite the trauma. If the child was still too

immature, stupid, fragile or stubborn to accept it, he would not last long.

Surprisingly and to the surprise of the rest of the group, the child began to cry silently, but stopped fidgeting around. Deep down, he already knew the truth.

The reason the child had survived until then, where stronger adults had perished, was, besides his good fortune, due to an Aether Skill that he had acquired as soon as he arrived on this planet.

As Aslael had explained to them, their Aetheric Code had been altered and sometimes their genetic code as well. In order to increase the chances of survival of the weakest, children in particular were the most severely affected. This did not seem to be systematic and the reasons behind the awakening of one gift or another were not clear.

However, one thing was certain. The talent obtained was never useless. This did not mean that all these talents were equal, though.

The kid's Aether skill was both extremely banal, but one that would serve him well until his death. He could sense danger. When his survival or the survival of those he cared about was threatened, he could sense it slightly in advance and extremely acutely. It was a sense of certainty that could not be ignored.

A few days earlier, he had unwittingly led his mother to areas and positions that maximized their chances of survival. In the mall, he had not gone up to the first floor where the Digestors were resting. Later in the forest, he had always changed direction slightly before the rest of the group reacted.

Each time this Spider sense was activated, its vitality, agility, strength and endurance would increase noticeably to assist him in

reacting adequately to the threat. Because of his young age, he had mistaken this new sensation for fear, a lethal fear that was impossible to repress.

And from a behavioural point of view it was a good thing. If the fear was less intense, he would have simply taken refuge in his mother's arms, but the sensations triggered by this Aether skill would only intensify if ignored.

When his mother had been captured, he had known that if he failed to get her out of the hands of the kidnappers, disaster would befall her. So despite all the red signals, he had thrown himself at their attackers to get his mother back, only to be knocked out miserably.

When he had woken up to the piercing sound of the Red Cube this morning, he had woken up with a heavy heart and by not finding his mother his distress had only worsened. He was so weak, so small. Because of him, his mother had died in vain.

‘If you want her to be proud of you, you shouldn't feel sorry for yourself.’ Jake declared, pulling him out of his melancholy black hole. ‘Become stronger and survive to prove that her death was not in vain.’

Jake himself cringed when he heard himself saying those words. But sometimes a few cliché phrases were well worth a long speech. Hopefully, that would be enough to give that child the momentum of determination he needed to survive.

So to get to the bottom of his idea, he handed the child his mother's turned off smartphone, telling him that his mother's souvenirs were inside and that somewhere on B842, he might still have his father alive looking for him.

Knowing that his father was probably looking for him calmed the child more than any condolences. Then getting up and patting the boy's shoulder to encourage him one last time, he went back to breakfast as if nothing had happened.

He'd be lying if he said he didn't use his Oracle device to find the right words. But he had done his best. An antisocial, unexpressive man like him was in the end the ideal person to announce heavy news. If an emergency surgeon were to burst into tears every time he announced the death of a patient to relatives, it would be excruciating.

For that, Amy was grateful. She knew that she would have been unable to keep her cool in delivering the news and would have broken down in tears with the child. Since her arrival on this planet, she had felt on the verge of tears continually.

Meanwhile, the hundreds of thousands of aliens had all risen up and were actively communicating, some of them through languages that could be learned by humans. Others, on the contrary, were chatting by exchanging all sorts of ultra or infrasonic signals, light impulses, pheromones, rattling or other obscure processes that Jake was unable to detect or interpret.

The suns rose one by one, the sky tinged with red and magenta. The clarity was now sufficient to ascertain the situation of the other camps around him, and the first thing he noticed was that the layout of the different camps had completely changed.

Not counting the group of criminals who had been all but wiped out except for their captives, Jake also discovered with amazement that all the males in the group of mud-colored skinned primitive alien humans had disappeared, leaving only a group of frightened women and children.

Some animal packs had also disappeared or were fewer in number. Even though he had not counted or memorized the number of aliens the night before at dusk, there was no doubt that they were much less numerous. At least fifty thousand fewer.

The huge lion that Crunch had joined was covered in greenish blood that wasn't his, a sign that the night had been extremely hectic for everyone, not just his group. As for his pet cat, it seemed to have grown again, starting to approach the dimensions of a small labrador. His claws were abnormally long and sharp and his black fur was glossy.

It seemed that the feline group it had joined was taking good care of him. At least on that side, he wouldn't have to worry. Compared to humans, animals seemed much more reliable to him.

The only human faction completely spared at first glance was the group of knights led by Enya, the noble woman with long pink hair. Yet it was only an impression. Two of the twenty elite ducal guards protecting the nobles were absent this morning, as were three of the nobles.

Paradoxically, the normal guards in armor protecting the commoners had been untouched, which was reminiscent of the invincible alien of that night who attacked the camp of criminals by attacking only their leaders.

If it was a similar monster attacking only the strongest who had assaulted them, then the people of this Enya were far more mysterious and dangerous than he first imagined. If his eyesight was any better, perhaps he would have noticed that most of the nobles looked terrible, as if they had just come out of a diarrhea several days long.

As for Terry the farmer, he was able to find his wife unharmed once the criminals had dispersed. With the help of the Digestor blood, he had regained some of his strength, but his broken knees had begun to harden in a wrong position. He now needed crutches to walk.

A few factionless humans had also survived despite the previous day's attack, either because they had fled or because, like Kyle, they had played dead by hiding in the sand.

What surprised Jake even more was that Yerode and Lamine, the two leaders of the mercenary group had miraculously survived. They were hiding discreetly among the factionless survivors with covered faces, although he would have recognized them out of a thousand. Lamine's sniper was impossible to forget.

Apart from being covered in blood and in pitiful condition, they seemed to have escaped unharmed, without any compromising wounds. For the moment, Jake could not say with a hundred percent certainty that he could have escaped unharmed from such a beast.

After raising his stats, he hadn't really had a chance to time himself. He had no idea what his top speed was and how long he could hold it. But escaping from an alien sprinting at over a hundred kilometers an hour would have definitely been an ordeal.

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