

# The Oracle Paths

## Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

### Chapter 152 - The Oracle City

Even though they knew this from their Shadow Guide's directions, they were still relieved to hear the confirmation from Jake. It had only taken them a few hours to get there, but they had been under pressure for months because of their Ordeal.

Besides, except for Tim and Crunch maybe, all of them were dead except Jake. It must have had an effect on their psyche. Their real bodies may have escaped unharmed, but the pain and experience was real.

Jake told them what he knew about the invisible Black Cube beneath and the Aether fee that was charged to enter the Oracle city. After completing an Ordeal, one Aether point was just pocket money to them, so no one flinched.

Jake then went down again, taking care to increase the number and depth of notches on the cliff so that everyone could go down without a problem. It probably wasn't necessary with the Black Cube underneath to intercept them, but it would be necessary to get back up the cliff.

To be frank, he was even surprised that Cho Min-Ho's group before them hadn't bothered to make the effort. The rock had been a little tamped in a few places like when Jake had kicked to create a foothold, but not enough to make a safe footing. Thinking about it, he realized that it made sense.

A normal person wishing to be a Civilian didn't need to climb back up. If the Korean wanted to have some control over the members of his faction, controlling the entrances and exits of the Oracle city was a good option. AS for Yerode and Lamine, they had probably jumped right in without a second thought given their character.

The group then started to descend using the improvised steps created by Jake, the latter bringing up the rear in case of any unpleasant surprises. Everyone had tied themselves to the same rope and if for any reason the group fell, he was confident that he could hold them back as long as the rope held.

Will was the first to make contact with the Black Cube, his foot going through it, although he was quickly slowed down by a strange force when he tried to insist. Like Jake before him, he received a notification from the Oracle System, but where Jake had refused, he agreed to pay his entrance fee.

Adouz sfiatfoare, ovu zulalofrhu ovfo nzuSurout vaq dzmq urouzare ovu Bifhc Cpgu talfnnufzut frt val gmtw hzfjiut arlatu. Tvu zulo md ovu ezmpn ovur zunufout ovu nzmhull proai mriw Jfcu jfl iudo ar ovu nzuhanahu.

When it was his turn again, this time he agreed to pay with his precious Aether and letting go of the cliff, his body disappeared into the Black Cube along with the rest of his companions.

At first, the black space filling his vision reminded him of the inside of the Red Cube before and after his Ordeal. However, the sensation didn't last. About a second later, his feet touched a hard surface and a city appeared before his eyes.

The members of his group were not far from him, and as he scanned the area he recognized that they had not left the abyss. They were

still inside the Black Cube, the only difference was that the clouds of streaked red lightning in the sky above them seemed much larger, as if they had become smaller.

The Cubes seemed to master space-manipulating technology as the Red Cube had demonstrated. Whether they had been shrunk or the edge of the Cube acted as a super zoom, one thing was for sure: The Oracle city was much bigger than they expected... and weirder too.

At first glance, the city was a few kilometers in diameter. It was enough to house several hundred thousand individuals, or even millions with buildings high enough. The problem was that the city itself was rather... desolate.

It was indeed teeming with life, since tens of thousands of humans, aliens and strange animals of all kinds had already joined it, but for the moment it looked more like a large outdoor camping area.

Rudimentary tents or huts had been set up everywhere, so much so that the area where they had appeared had already become a veritable dumping ground. There were, however, elements that stood out from the rest in the heart of the city.

These included the cluster of cubes of different colours and sizes in the center, which resembled a game of Tetris. Around these cubes, there were also buildings built in a kind of carbon grey metal completely devoid of any architectural identity.

Again, these were blocks of different sizes, sometimes cubic, cylindrical, conical, pyramidal or dome-shaped. There were no visible windows or doors, but messages of light engraved on the facades in a language with symbols more complex than anything he had seen so far indicated their function.

Efhv md ovulu lwqgmil jfl iacu f Cvarulu laer, gpo jaov our ovmplfrt oaqul fl qfrw iarul. Tvu nzmgiuq jfl ovfo rm mru vuzu luuqut om gu fgiu om zuft frt prtuzlofrt ovulu oukol.

Touching the edge of the Black Cube, which had become invisible behind him, Jake received the notification again asking him if he wanted to exit at the cost of one unit of Aether, confirming that at least getting out of town was not hard.

As they wondered where to go first, a bat-sized silver spherical drone, strewn with veins of blue light, floated towards them without making a sound. Jake felt as if he'd just met back the drone that had delivered his bracelet. Distrustful, he prepared to fight, but a typical female voice like the one in the TV commercials sounded from the machine in good English.

'Welcome to the Shelter EBFGS12456-----.' The AI began its welcome speech in an automated manner.

'I'm the AI who has been assigned to your group. As this is your first time in an Oracle city, I'm here to inform you of the rules of conduct and answer any questions you may have.'

'Hmmm, Xi? Couldn't you answer these questions instead? You two are considered Oracle AI's, right?' Jake questioned his own AI instead, ignoring the drone addressing them for the moment.

Kyle and Tim, on the other hand, enthusiastically started communicating with the drone. They seemed to be science fiction fanatics. So was Jake, but he wasn't the type to get excited about something he'd seen before.

The problem was Crunch, who had decided that the drone looked very similar to the ball he liked to play with. The drone nevertheless

showed remarkable composure, silently avoiding every sneaky paw swing of the cat without stopping for a second to answer questions.

[I can.] Xi confirmed with a snort. [It's just an attempt by the Oracle to glean a little more Aether. The drone should be trying to sell you something soon.]

Unsurprisingly, that's exactly what happened. After briefly explaining the city's living rules - not to kill, steal, or harm the holders of Oracle devices - the drone did attempt to sell them an item.

'The official language of the Mirror Universe is a must if you want to be able to communicate and navigate easily in an Oracle city. Unfortunately, it's an extremely complex language because it has to be able to express the nuances and concepts of each race.

'You can acquire the knowledge of this language in the Oracle Store for the price of a certain amount of Aether, but in the meantime you can use one of our universal translators. They will allow you to communicate with any species, regardless of your language and mode of communication.

'Do you want to use one of our translators?'

[ Decline. ] Xi shouted without hesitation.

Rather trusting his AI, Jake turned down the offer. Kyle was the only one who accepted, but more out of curiosity.

'Do you want to buy one of our universal translators or just borrow it?'

'Could I know the prices beforehand?' the Playboy asked out of precaution. He was curious, not naive.

‘Since this is your first time in an Oracle city, the permanent purchase of a translator will cost you 10,000 units of Aether. If you just want to borrow one, it will cost you 10 Aether units per day. ‘

‘Uh... Well, no thanks. ‘Kyle almost cried.’ Just out of curiosity, how much does it normally cost for a translator. ‘

‘100,000 units of Aether. ‘

‘Fuck!’ They all swore at the same time, even Tim.

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