

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 156 - The Floating Islands

Military members of the Earth Government. They no longer wore the colourful green or khaki outfits designed to facilitate camouflage, but black uniforms with several pieces of armour protecting their vital points. They wore an assault rifle slung across their shoulders and a gun on their belts, but their design was somewhat different, although he was by no means a specialist in this field.

Considering the size of the planet, the likelihood of encountering Earth military personnel was incredibly low. If he squandered that opportunity, he'd be a complete moron. As he walked towards them, he tried to contact his other companions, but they were out of range.

'Excuse me. Mind if I sit down here with you?' Jake asked politely in English.

To their gloomy expressions, they were clearly not new recruits. To eat a dish in this restaurant, they either had to be very stupid, or be much richer in Aether than he was right now.

The duo stopped eating for a moment to inspect the newcomer. Their grumpy faces lit up as soon as they saw him, the man literally bursting into laughter.

'At last! We found a Earthling! Three weeks we've been waiting in this godforsaken hole!'

‘I couldn’t take it anymore... I must’ve gained two or three pounds from eating all that junk food...’ The young woman added with a relieved tone while continuing to dip her fries in a pot of ketchup.

Jake was stunned to see their reaction far from the seriousness of the army he had expected.

‘Sit at our table, no manners with us!’ The man exclaimed, pointing to the chair in front of him.

Their exuberance turned the heads of a few humans who were eating silently beside them, but because they were from another planet they could not understand anything and therefore lost interest just as quickly.

‘My name is Patrick, Sergeant-Chief of the Earth Army and she is Alima, of the same rank.’ The soldier introduced him and his colleague in a jovial tone. ‘We’re here to liaise with the Earth Government and secondarily to recruit or safeguard the Earthlings who come here.’

Jake was interested in the goals of their mission, but he had no confidence in the government. After all, the government had preferred to sacrifice all non-essential personnel by warning humanity at the last moment.

As for the disappearance of the Earth, the uninvolved humans had discovered it on their own at their expense. Even if he understood such a silence in order to avoid mass panic and riots, it was still extremely petty and immoral.

‘My name is Jake. To be honest, I’m not really interested in joining the Government at the moment. What’s in it for me?’

‘To tell you the truth, not much.’ Alima sneered with her mouth full of her hamburger. ‘The government doesn’t really have a proper

structure now. The president is struggling to rally authority around him.

‘ A few Evolvers and Players who were originally just soldiers have already become powerful enough to form their own factions. They still obey the government on paper, but in practice we have no control over them.

‘It’s not all bad, though. ‘ Patrick completed by raising his plate.‘With the material resources and technology at Earth’s disposal, we’ve still managed to accumulate a lot of Aether and a comfortable position on Thelma. The government has even secured one of the floating islands orbiting B842. ‘

‘Thelma? Floating islands? ‘Jake repeated with confusion

‘Oh, I forgot you just got here, burp! Oh, God, my bloating’s coming back.‘ The soldier remembered, burping after a sip of coke.

‘The Black Cube you came from is an Oracle Shelter. ‘ Alima explained in his place. ‘ They call them Oracle Cities, but that’s an abuse of language. Aside from the limited infrastructure provided by the Oracle System, there’s not much else. Refugees accumulate there without being able to pay the Aether taxes and form shanties and slums outside of the force field where the Oracle Cubes and other Oracle buildings are located.‘

‘These facilities, like the Oracle Playground, are connected to each other and form a network through the various Orange Cubes. The Orange Cube in each plaza here leads to a different Oracle Shelter. There are about 100 plazas around the city where we are, so there are 100 different Oracle Shelters connected to this place.

‘The place where we are may be considered an Oracle City, but there are bigger ones. By borrowing the big Orange Cubes around the

skyscraper next door you can join other nearby Oracle Playground cities for 50 points of Aether or even other infrastructures of the same level to avoid wasting time each time by going back to your Oracle Shelter to change buildings.

‘If you pay 500 Aether points, you can use the Yellow Cube and reach Thelma, but it’s expensive even for us, so we don’t go there often. Thelma can be considered the Oracle Capital. Governments and big names of all species capable enough have formed their own base and it is even possible to meet the Oracle Overseer up there. ‘

Jake effortlessly digested this new information, but even with his newfound intelligence he couldn’t help but be impressed. He felt like a microbe in the middle of a world so vast that he could hardly grasp its limits.

‘What about those floating islands? ‘ Jake picked up on the subject, trying to conserve his composure. Though he was shaken, he had no intention of showing it.

‘Thelma is a floating island, the largest of them all at the moment, but there are plenty more around B842, orbiting hundreds of miles or more. ‘Patrick, who had finally finished his meal, took over and explained the rest to him.

‘With a Tier 6 Oracle Rank and the Player status it is possible to buy one of these islands, but I don’t know all the details. All I know is that they are artificially created by the Oracle and that the number of completed Ordeals required is sky high if you want to get a big one. You can customize them any way you want, even enlarge them. They say that when Earth Government Island was first created, it was no bigger than a football field. Now, we should be able to fit the United Kingdom in there.’

‘Why not directly monopolise a few Oracle Shelters or build a base in a suitable location right on the planet’s surface?’ Jake interrupted him, not convinced these islands were worth the investment.

If they were to be expanded directly through the Oracle System, it would probably cost a fortune just to extend it a few meters.

‘We’ve tried that in the past.’ Alima admitted with a stern face. ‘But none of those bases held. As soon as too many intelligent life forms concentrate in one place the Digestors show up. The more powerful the warriors are, the more Aether they have and the more they attract Aether to them.’

‘In other words, the better the defense of our base, the brighter we shine, which attracts the high-ranking Digestors like shit draws flies. At least on one of these islands, we can control the elimination of the Digestors as soon as they spawn from the atmosphere. And by installing a Black Cube it’s possible to mask the Aether signature of its inhabitants, which is the only known way to develop in peace.’

‘What about the Oracle Shelters?’ Jake asked.

‘We partially control a few, but there are too many and the prices in Aether are too high.’ The two soldiers sighed long and hard.

‘It’s hard to get enough humans in there and there’s not enough space to grow anything. Even if we try to grow crops outside, then the other aliens steal our crops and if we post our Evolvers and high level Players to defend them, the Digestors will show up right away.’

‘Most importantly, it’s impossible to ban entry into an Oracle Shelter because violence is forbidden. If you use one of the Orange Cubes present, you can join any one of them and no one will be able

to stop you. The true masters of Oracle Shelters and Cities are the Oracle drones.'

Jake remained silent for a long time after that, meditating on what he had just learned. With no faction or organization to manage, government issues weren't really his concern. If he could buy or build a mansion with everything he needed, he would probably be satisfied.

His intuition, however, was that these islands were important. Because Jake was also convinced that the Black Cubes could be purchased directly from the Oracle Store. So building an undetectable base directly on the planet wasn't really impossible.

This meant that the Black Cubes were not so invincible and therefore the security of the Oracle Shelters relied more on its drones than on its Cube. In this case, how were these floating islands different? They may have been floating, but given the speed at which these creatures evolved, there must have been a bunch of them capable of flying at that altitude. Without Oracle drones, these islands were pretty much indefensible in the event of an attack.

As he checked the time, he realized that the moment he was supposed to meet up with his group was almost upon him. He would have to put the rest of this conversation off for another day.