

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 157 - Business Opportunities

‘Sorry, I gotta go. ‘Jake apologized abruptly as he got up. ‘We made a schedule with the rest of my group to meet at the plaza where we appeared.

‘Oh, no worries. I completely understand. ‘Patrick accepted his apology with an understanding smile. AS he wiped his mouth with the sleeve of his uniform, he added, ‘Do you mind if we come with you? We’re off duty at the moment. We can explain the rest to you on the way. ‘

Jake pondered for a moment and then nodded, thinking it was a bargain. The two soldiers were good company and were a mine of free information. Only the Oracle knew how long and how much Aether the information would have cost him if he had had to get it alone.

Alima had also finished eating, but more graceful than her colleague, she rinsed her hands and face at the nearby fountain. Once ready, Jake set off again towards the Orange Cube he had come by.

In less than a minute, the trio covered the three four kilometers in a straight line separating them from the plaza. Although he had expected it, he was still somewhat impressed to see the two soldiers following his pace effortlessly. What made him jealous, in particular, was that their black leather boots were not deteriorating, unlike his own, which had reached a dangerously alarming level of wear and tear.

‘Is it the government that provides all your equipment, or do you have to buy it yourself?’ Jake asked curiously when he saw that they were a bit ahead of the rest of his group.

Alima and Patrick glanced at his boots and chuckled in amusement. Nevertheless, they answered him frankly without the slightest condescension. After all, they had been there too.

‘The government provides the uniform for the Players and Evolvers working for them, but the quality differs greatly from one soldier to another.’

‘It must cost a fortune, right?’ Jake had a hard time understanding how the government could spend so much Aether on his army if the most powerful Players and Evolvers were already out of control.

‘Yes and no.’ Alima answered, guessing his reasoning. ‘Except for the richest Evolvers, nobody buys their equipment or anything really expensive directly from the Oracle Store. Every Blue Cube in the shops here is a kiosk giving access to the Oracle Store. Even if a human ran the store instead of a drone, the prices would be the same. The drone simply prevents scams.’

‘In this case, the government has what it takes to make them.’ Jake concluded aloud. ‘So, how does it solve the problem of raw materials? Even using the Earth’s resources before, there are limits to what it can do.’

‘That’s where our role comes in.’ Patrick continued, pulling a piece of gum out of nowhere. ‘The normal military on the flying island, which is called New Earth by the way, is not much different from the humans being transported on B842 for the first time. With the exception of their training and firearms, their role is limited to

ensuring the safety of the island or monitoring the Transport Cubes in the Oracle Shelters.

‘However, with sufficient manpower and adequate firepower, it is still possible for the government to accumulate resources. An air strike of missiles or a nuke on a horde of Digestors or low-level creatures is enough to ensure a steady stream of Aether. A senior officer will then retrieve the Aether and return it to a key government official for reinvestment.

‘If they want the remains in good condition for furs, skins or bones, they send Evolvers like us. We can keep the Aether for ourselves, but the materials must be returned for contribution points. We get paid in Aether and contribution points based on the quality of what we bring back to HQ.

‘Our equipment is designed largely from these materials by the science and research department and we can use our contribution points to get equipment. These lab rats are overly arrogant, but they’re doing a good job, you’ve got to give them credit for that.’

Hearing their explanation, Jake was even more reluctant to join the army. He had never really had the soul of a patriot and his first feeling was that without New Earth, the government would probably have collapsed.

Having equipment benefits or a guaranteed salary in Aether was certainly pleasant, but the fact that they couldn’t leave New Earth or the Oracle Shelter without permission was a real deterrent, which would slow down their progress considerably.

At that moment, a mass of hair as hard as thorns snuggled up against his leg, tearing his pants even more. Jake was really starting to look like a vagrant with holes in his boots and ragged pants.

‘Fuck off Crunch!’ Jake grabbed the mastiff-sized black cat by the neck, giving the two soldiers present a rather ridiculous view.

‘Unless you’ve got enough Aether to buy me more clothes, I suggest you stop that!’

‘Pfffft!’ Alima burst out laughing, while Patrick nearly choked on his gum, which almost got down the wrong way.

Tim and Will arrived shortly afterwards, jogging along and suspiciously staring at the two strangers. Recognizing the crest on their uniforms, Will relaxed visibly. With Jake’s introduction, the former businessman eagerly shook their hands as if he was about to close a great deal.

Kyle and Sarah joined them a few seconds later with a look of frustration. After the two soldiers introduced themselves again, Kyle began to rant and rave in an outraged tone.

‘We saw Amy. The bitch wouldn’t even talk, claiming she was busy. My àss is busy!’

Jake raised an questioning eyebrow. Sarah shrugged, explaining the situation in an awkward tone.

‘Cho Min-Ho asked her to give him a report on the Oracle Playground by the end of the day. She was to list the various prices of real estate sales and rentals, each shop and the prices charged depending on whether it was occupied by Oracle drone or not, as well as any profit opportunities she might have found.

‘She said this is a test that Min-Ho gave her and that she must absolutely fulfill her mission to prove her worth...’

‘I swear this bitch had hearts in her eyes at that moment!’ Kyle, who was still spitting out his venom, sneered.

‘All right, calm down. Amy’s free to do whatever she wants.’ Will mediated as he patted the shoulder of the Playboy whose ego seemed to have taken a hit.

‘This Cho Min-Ho is a formidable businessman. If he gave this assignment to Amy instead of handling it in person, it’s probably a test indeed. He’s already starting to cultivate his trustworthy men and women, I see... ‘

Jake nodded to show he felt the same way. He agreed with Will. That was the advantage of big corporations. They could easily divide up the work. The Korean was certainly active somewhere else, as were most of his promising new hires.

For Jake, on the other hand, it wasn’t very good news. This Oracle Playground was still sparsely populated due to the high Aether fees to get into the heart of the Shelter, but it would soon fill up as new Players and Evolvers joined the Shelters.

‘Cho Min-ho, that sounds familiar...‘ Alima whispered, scratching her chin pensively. ‘Oh, I remember, Cho Industries! They’re fucking rich.’

‘Were...‘ Patrick added. ‘If he’s here on his own, it means his family knew nothing about the whole truth behind the Mirror Universe. They must be completely scattered all over the planet right now.’

‘ He has his two bodyguards with him, that’s all I know.’ Jake said, not really concerned.

‘Hmmm... ‘In that case, if every key Cho member is protected they have a chance of reforming provided those bodyguards are loyal. The most important thing in the beginning is to survive and accumulate Aether. After that, like everywhere else, you have to manage your Aether and invest.

‘That’s why violence and theft are forbidden in the Oracle Cities. To allow these business-minded civilians to prosper and thrive.’

As Will heard those last words, a spark went through his eyes. Finally, he may have a chance to shine. As for Jake, even though he knew nothing about business, he didn’t intend to get stepped on, either.

As with Bitcoin a century earlier, anyone who had bought some in the early days of crypto currency for a few dollars had made millions a few years later. The situation was the same today on B842. First come, first served.