

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 158 - The Pyramid

Now that everyone had arrived, there was no reason for them to stay here any longer. Jake and the rest of the group borrowed the Orange Cube they had come in, and then retraced their steps back to the lobby of the Oracle Playground.

On the way out, Jake ran into Enya, the pink-haired young woman, followed by another group of nobles and a few bodyguards. Once again, she was surprised to run into him twice in such a short time, not to mention the fact that his group had arrived before them, but she didn't mind. After all, their mobility was rather limited because of the civilians they were protecting.

Choosing to mind his own business, Jake ignored them, even though Will, in a teasing mood, winked at the lady. Sarah rolled her eyes when she saw his flirtation attempt, but Kyle also seemed tempted to do the same. After all, a second pink-haired beauty, looking just like her, was standing beside the young woman. Probably her sister, or a cousin. There were enough for both of them. As the saying goes, 'Caring is sharing!'

Patrick and Alima took one look at the troop of humans dressed in medieval clothing and armor, but they lost interest when they realized they weren't from Earth. In the Mirror Universe, most of the human species generally stick together, followed by the humanoid species on a larger scale, but this was by no means guaranteed.

At least when it came to controlling an Oracle City or an Oracle Playground, the competition was as fierce as between two countries at war. Most of the time, the most technologically advanced civilization would take control of the Shelter, since violence was forbidden, but it was not always the case.

‘What should we visit first when we enter an Oracle Shelter for the first time?’ Jake questioned the two soldiers once outside.

The two soldiers were surprised for a while when they saw the clouds full of red lightning, but they quickly regained their composure. As they watched the tens of thousands of refugees gathering outside the force field, they saluted the chance they had been given to enter B842 in advance.

‘It depends on your priorities.’ Alima replied, ‘If you want a job, you can sign up for Missions Halls. There are two of them. The regular one and the Oracle Mission Hall. The first is for jobs and assignments given by other Evolvers, while the second is for assignments given directly by the Oracle. Whichever hall you go to, there should be an Earth military officer on duty ready to receive you there.’

None of them wanted to work or risk their lives right now. They just wanted to get information and rest after their Ordeal. Jake was no different. He wanted some peace and quiet to check his rewards and take stock of his situation.

‘Or else, there’s the Civilian, Evolver, and Player Hall if you want to meet people who match you or register a faction, guild, or business. There’s the Oracle Bank if you want to protect your possessions or Aether Crystals.’ Patrick added, seeing as they didn’t seem to be too excited.

‘Right now we just want to rest, I guess.’ Jake apologized with a sorry smile. ‘Is there a cheap solution that would keep us from pitching our tents in the middle of the dump outside?’

‘Oh, yes, of course. Follow me, I’ll show you.’ Patrick beckoned them to follow him.

In a few short strides, he led them to a huge carbon gray pyramid, not much smaller than the cylinder forming the Oracle Playground. Without hesitation, the soldier entered the pyramid, disappearing into another vortex of liquid metal.

Alima entered after her colleague, with Jake’s group following close behind. The inside presented them with a very different entrance hall than the one in the Oracle Playground.

Once again, there were posts and counters manned by drones. However, the environment was as stark as it could be. Floor, wall and ceiling were covered with dark metal and hundreds of corridors were spreading out in all directions. Orange Cubes were visible at regular intervals and symbols were visible along the corridor walls. A single Yellow Cube was towering in the very middle of the hall.

‘Welcome to the Oracle Bunker. It’s a bit like a boat cabin when you’re not used to it, but you won’t find anything cheaper and it’s customizable at will.’ Patrick said proudly. ‘Even if everything else goes wrong, your cabin will still be there.’

The rest of the group listened carefully to the rest of his explanations and concluded that indeed they would not find anything better. The prices of the Oracle Playground residences were simply unaffordable at the moment, and privacy was not really granted since only violence and theft was condemned.

Beginning to get familiar with the process, Jake let Xi translate the map presented by the digital kiosk. Once done, he was finally able to choose a booth matching the size of his purse.

It was relatively simple. The Oracle loved binary. He'd already realized this with the price of the different types of Aether. For every additional ten square meters of space, the cost in Aether per day doubled. To buy it permanently, you had to multiply the price by a thousand.

An Evolver could only own one cabin. It was the Oracle's logical countermeasure to keep everyone from renting multiple cabins at low prices. The good thing, however, was that it was easy to get into them no matter what Oracle Shelter or City you were in.

The good news was that 10 square meters only cost 1 pts of Aether per day. Even if he decided to hide inside the Oracle Shelter without doing anything, he could hold on to his reserves for a few months without any problem. Of course, this did not take into account the cost of living within the Black Cube.

The problem was that to add furniture, a toilet, a shower or a faucet, you had to pay extra. Simply adding a shower and toilet added 10 extra points per day and immediately it was not as customer friendly.

Nevertheless, Jake agreed to pay. In the end he selected a 20 square meter cabin with toilet and shower for 12 Aether points per day. He didn't intend to twiddle his thumbs. As soon as he figured out his strategy, he would take action. And if he had to take a risk by leaving the Shelter to replenish his Aether, he wouldn't hesitate.

Tvu ezmpn gat dfzujui om ovu ojm lmitauzl, jvm ardmzqut ovuq ovfo ovuw jmpit gu jfaoare dmz ovuq fo ovu Mallamr Hfii ad ovuw jfroum om bmar ovu emsuzrquro mz bplo ruutut vuin dartare jmzc.

On this point, it had to be admitted that the Earth Government had done a good job posting military personnel in most of the Oracle Cities and Playgrounds. Not all alien species could say the same.

Jake then walked with his cat to the custom booth he had chosen. If he was just a normal human, he would have probably gotten lost in the pyramid. By borrowing the Yellow Cube, it was possible to reach his cabin by paying 50 pts of Aether, but the best was to borrow the Orange Cubes, which were free.

The only problem was that you had to use quite a number of them to reach the cabin of your choice, each time choosing among multiple destinations with long series of Symbols and numbers. A normal human would have been lost after a few teleports without the help of his AI.

Fortunately, Jake's intelligence had not been enhanced for nothing. Even after having used one hundred Orange Cubes in a row, meandering from one corridor to another, he still remembered his way back perfectly.

Crunch had complete confidence in his master, letting himself be carried from one Cube to the next without batting an eyelid. Momentarily, Jake freaked out when he became aware that his booth had no litter box, but relaxed instantly when he remembered that Crunch knew how to use the toilet.

His only problem was that the cat was now much bigger. A feline the size of a big dog sitting on a toilet bowl was going to be quite a sight, not to mention the smell...

When he thought of this major concern, Jake's face fell and he stopped abruptly to look for a post or drone nearby. Luckily, there were plenty of them everywhere.

Connecting his bracelet to his cat's, he managed to use his authority as owner via the Pet Contract to reserve a second booth, which in addition could be directly connected through one of those vortex gates.

There were two advantages resulting from this action: First, he was able to double the space in his booth for cheap, since it legally belonged to his cat. And secondly, he realized that his cat was rich.