

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 188 - Back to the Shelter

Humans and felines paid the Aether point required to cross the Black Cube and reappeared into the Shelter a split second later. The black clouds had now all but dissipated and two orange suns were now providing their auspicious brightness.

The arrival in the city posed a major problem for Jake, which immediately dampened his mood. The ground under their feet was no longer just dirt or dust, but a kind of huge metal slab.

Jake couldn't feel the Aether in this material and since the floor itself seemed to be forged in one single piece, manipulating it would have been extremely complicated if not impossible in any case.

His temporary ability to manipulate the earth had therefore become useless and the direct consequence of this was that he had just lost his means of locomotion. Still having his pride, he had anticipated the situation by pruning two long sticks in advance to act as crutches.

If he wanted to, he could certainly creep or crawl faster than a normal adult human, but there was no way he would endure such humiliation.

Yet he had not forgotten why he had taken all these risks and why his knees were in this state. With 14,500 Aether points, Jake decided this time to rent a universal translator for the day.

The translator in question was a simple black marble like obsidian to feed to his bracelet. Once the marble was consumed, all the words he heard were translated directly into his mind as if an interpreter had come to occupy his brain. It was relatively miraculous, since the voice of the translation was very similar in tone to that of the person being translated. It gave the impression that these people were speaking directly to him in English, which was extremely disconcerting.

He didn't know what it would be like with other species without vocal cords communicating with their mandibles or antennae. Would they have a deep or high-pitched voice? Or perhaps an improbable timbre of voice for a human, but somehow matching them?

If Jake had been able to save those 10 Aether points he would have done so, but he was too worn out and weary to bother about a few points. He wanted to quickly solve his overloaded Aether stats issue before the Kintharian and Myrmidian blood effect ended.

'By the way... What happened to Tim?' Jake suddenly thought of the child for no particular reason. The last time he'd seen him, the teenager was on his way alone to his new cabin in the Oracle Bunker and Kyle had gone the same way.

Kyle shrugged in response without showing any concern. His slightly slumped back and blank stare betrayed his exhaustion. He had already consumed the Digestor blood from the Rank 7, but he would need rest to recover. Sarah may have looked better, but she was a better actress when it came to hiding her injuries.

Both princesses were just as exhausted, but they were in a comparatively better mood. To be alive and pretty much intact after such a night seemed almost unreal to them. They had suffered some

injuries, of course, but they had already forgotten about them after Jake passed them one of his blood-filled canteens.

When they saw their former ducal guards, though, their relaxed faces tensed up dramatically. Both men were exhausted and covered in silvery blood, but otherwise they were unharmed.

When they caught sight of Jake's party and the two surviving princesses, they frowned with some apprehension. Especially Jake, who had survived with holes in his knees in the midst of such a horde. He was the kind of foe they wanted to avoid.

Not to mention the bunch of felines walking with them. With each step of the Lion and Tiger, refugees of all species would scatter in their wake like a flock of birds after a rifle shot.

The two men, however, were worrying for nothing. Jake didn't give a damn about those two bastards. If there were two people he wanted dead above all else it was Yerode and Lamine. His Shadow Guide could locate them and point the way to them again, but it didn't matter now that they had reached the Shelter's secure area.

The two princesses halted briefly when they reached the position of their former guards. Esya, the little sister, was biting her lip, barely holding back from slapping them. Enya was calmer, but she gave them a judgmental look.

'I hope you won't regret your choice...' Enya finally said after staring at them silently for half a minute. 'For your long years of service to my family, I forgive you, but from today we are strangers.'

Esya's shocked face revealed her unequivocal disagreement with her sister's act of clemency, and did not seem ready to stop there.

Nevertheless, Enya grabbed her firmly by the hand and forced her to

follow her. Following them with her gaze as she walked away, Esya still gave them one last glare before leaving with a ‘ Hmmf ‘.

Jake chose wisely not to interfere in their affairs. Now that he had the translator with him, he could easily follow their conversations and it gave him some insights.

The interesting point, apart from the fact that they belonged to an influential family that these two traitors once served, was that with the help of the translator he realized that learning their language was extremely simple.

Every word they had spoken in their native language Jake had memorized them perfectly down to the accent thanks to his phenomenal memory. With translation and his superhuman intelligence he could easily derive the conjugation and semantic rules of a new language.

He was almost certain that he could gibber their language decently by listening to them speak for a day. If they taught him their alphabet and gave him a dictionary, it could be accomplished very quickly once he had the basics.

The group continued to walk to the rhythm of Jake’s crutches, until they passed the internal force field marking the entrance to the Oracle City and its structures. The refugees outside were technically only in the Oracle Shelter, and had no access to any of the facilities provided by the Black Cube.

In the end, Will and Tim were waiting for them there. Will was pale and his eyes were ringed, indicating that he had spent a sleepless night waiting for them. Unlike Crunch, he knew his limits and hadn’t tried to rejoin them.

Tim, in contrast, had the healthy composure of a teenager having enjoyed a good restorative sleep. Unsuspectingly, he had fallen asleep quickly after eating a few cans the night before, enjoying a moment's respite for the first time since his arrival in the Mirror Universe.

His jaded and still sleepy expression showed that he was not much shocked by their injuries. One could only wonder what his Ordeal consisted of to transform a five-year-old child into such a calm teenager.

Tim was not very tall for his age, around 1m60, but his body was tanned and slender and his short brown hair was slightly discoloured by long exposure to the sun and sea wind.

Will, the adult, was comparatively much less calm. On discovering their pitiful state and the pack of felines accompanying them, the thirty-year-old man could not help but exclaim:

‘ My God, what the hell happened out there ? I couldn't sleep a wink all night knowing you were outside with those monsters. ‘

The businessman with glasses quickly inspected their respective injuries by feeling their legs, torsos and arms without asking their opinion, but a stern warning look on Sarah's face when he tried to scrutinize the gash between her breasts reminded him that he'd better respect the rules of distancing...

‘Ahem, you're alive, that's all that matters... ‘Will abruptly concluded as he pushed his glasses back on to hide his awkwardness.

‘Hmm.‘ Jake was just too tired to waste his breath.

Knowing Will's character and ambitions, Jake graciously rented a second translator for the businessman. If it could save them time

while he gleaned information, it was worth it. Will could certainly afford to pay for a translator out of his own savings, but Jake knew that he was the poorest among them.

Because no gift was free, Jake then explained his intentions to Will, showing him the loot he and the lions were carrying. He would be responsible for determining the best way to make their 'merchandise' profitable by securing potential buyer(s).

Partnering with Alima and Patrigh of the Earth Government remained their first choice, even though Jake didn't really consider himself a patriot. However, if an alien offered a much better price or showed a particular talent, Jake would not hesitate to sell to the highest bidder.

Jake then mentally communicated with the Lion and Tiger to convince them to hire a translator. The two felines were much richer than he was and had never spent their Aether since their arrival on planet B842.

After several minutes of struggling to make them understand his intentions, Jake finally managed to persuade them to lease a translator.

If he had known that the two felines had ended up spending 100,000 Aether points each to buy a universal translator instead of renting one, he would undoubtedly have introduced them to the English insults that the two felines could now understand.