

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 189 – The Green Cube

Will was thrilled to get the chance to put his talents to good use. The last few months had been a nightmare for him. Because of the Digestors, his Ordeal had taken a disastrous turn and his rating was mediocre.

Fortunately, he had still received a special award that met his requirements. But for this, he would need Aether, a lot of Aether.

Jake's task gave him a good opportunity to show off his talents and gain the young man's confidence. Will, like Sarah, was a logical and rational person with a balanced and caring upbringing. He had a good understanding of his strengths, weaknesses and limitations.

Fighting hordes of monsters was not for him, even though he knew that being able to defend himself was still a necessity. Entering the Ordeals alone was no longer a satisfactory plan either.

It was safe for the first four Ordeals, but experience had shown that there were too many variables that he could not control. Who could guarantee that a person like Jake would not need his trading skills in a future Ordeal either?

Taking his courage in both hands and a deep breath, Will stood before the Lion and Tiger, then seeing that they had no intention of devouring him and listening carefully to his words, he relaxed. A moment later, he had recovered his bearings and the composure of an experienced businessman.

Seeing that Will appeared to have things under control, the rest of the group decided to go to the giant Green Cube first to heal their wounds. If the prices turned out to be too high for them, they would settle for Digestor's blood. Still, they had to know them, since in an emergency situation they might not have a choice.

The relevant Cube was a little smaller but no less massive than the Red Cube in which they had participated in their first Ordeal. It stood close to the Pentagonal building containing the various Mission Halls, which circumscribed in its center another Red Cube of similar size.

It was as if the Oracle was expecting the Evolvers and Players to return from the mission wounded. This reminded Jake of another question he had been wondering about.

'When you died in the Ordeal, was there a consequence? Like a healing tax or a malus on your rating?' Jake asked Sarah and Kyle, since he didn't know Tim's exact circumstances.

The two princesses had eventually rent the universal translator as well. Although they were keeping their silence, perhaps out of shyness, they were not completely out of the conversation.

Sarah and Kyle flinched when they heard the question. The feeling of dying was still fresh in their minds. After thinking about their answer for a few seconds, Kyle answered :

'I believe... the resurrection was supposed to be charged 50 credits and would have reduced our Ordeal rating by that much. '

It was in line with the stingy side of the Oracle System that he was aware of. Jake knew the credits were exceptionally valuable. Far more than the Aether equivalent to buying something in the Oracle Store. He hadn't yet visited the gigantic Blue Cube corresponding to the Oracle Store, but he should pay it a visit soon.

It was an absolute necessity. After the malicious ambush of Yerode and Lamine that had cost him his knees, he absolutely had to make the effort to memorize all the Aether skills and Oracle device's skills available for his Oracle Rank.

Jake hadn't tried at the end of his Ordeal, because he was pressed for time, but it was now a sine qua non condition for his survival if he didn't wish for such a situation to happen again.

'Would have?' Jake noticed the incongruity in Kyle's words.

This time it was Sarah who explained.

'The fifty credits had been deducted from our reward, but the Oracle System suddenly decided to reimburse us. It's consistent with your discovery of Digestors in the Temple.'

'Oh... Does that mean that theoretically, every dead contestant in the arena owes me 50 credits?' Jake's face lit up when he learned this juicy detail.

'What Digestors?' Kyle, who still didn't know about the Digestors inside the Ordeal, interrupted them with a confused look.

Jake explained to him again what happened after they died in the arena as they walked to the Green Cube. Kyle was shocked but quickly came to his senses. It was kind of reassuring in a way.

That first Ordeal was not normal! He had already promised himself that if the next three were as dangerous as the first, he would never participate in the fifth. He cared about his life!

Upon arriving at the edge of the Green Cube, Jake inspected the emerald green reflections and glimmers running through the structure with unabashed curiosity. The Oracle was probably the

only thing or person capable of manufacturing such a mysterious object.

[The Oracle System is omniscient, it's a fact.] Xi completed his thoughts. [But, he feeds off the knowledge of the bracelet wearers. Everything you learn, the Oracle learns too. By following this logic, it's possible the Oracle has not always known how to make these Cubes.]

'Makes sense. 'Jake nodded unconsciously. ' My opinion, however, is that in order to predict the future of everything that is part of his System, the Oracle must have all the elements in hand from the start. You said it yourself. If he's missing an initial detail, an Aetheric or Physical law that he doesn't know about, the calculations would automatically become wrong.]

[...but the Oracle doesn't know everything.] The Oracle AI refuted in a soft, barely audible voice. [The Digestors are proof of this.]

This was indeed the weak point of his argument. The Oracle only understood what came from its Mirror Universe. If the Cubes came from somewhere else, then it was learned or stolen technology.

Jake, Kyle, and Sarah then put their palms against the surface of the Green Cube facing them in anticipation of the familiar system notification. Tim and Crunch, who were fine, chose to accompany Will and the other felines. Tim loved animals and Crunch hadn't given up on his idea of wooing the female leopard.

The notification simply asked them if they wanted to enter the Cube. To their delight, there was not one more head tax. They soon changed their minds once inside.

If the Red Cube contained a mysterious, lightless space inside, serving as a launching pad to the Ordeal Worlds, the space inside the Green Cube was its exact opposite.

White light as intense as the sun as far as the eye could see, so intense that they could barely see their own bodies. Jake could no longer see or hear Sarah and Kyle. Despite the intense white light, his eyes didn't hurt and he didn't feel particularly dazzled.

Jake suddenly felt a shiver run through him and noticed a soft emerald light coming out of nowhere scanning his body from head to toe without him being able to stop it. Once the scan was completed, a notification of the Oracle System popped up in his mind.

[Health state good, psychic state good, functional immune system, no genetic abnormalities.]

[Bimmt hmpro al guimj ovu uknuhout smipqu.] [Sufzhv dmz arbpzaul...]

[Knee injury: Punctured patellas with rupture and partial destruction of the ligaments and associated menisci. Cost of treatment: 27,800 points]

[Searching for Aetheric Anomalies...]

[Aetheric anomaly detected: Overloaded stats and foreign Aether sources. Do you want to re-encode your Aether? Cost of the procedure: 250,000 pts]

Jake didn't know whether to laugh or cry. It was a relief to learn that his wounds were not impossible for the Oracle to heal, but the price was just... too high. As for re-encoding his Aether, he had every intention of consulting an Aetherist to fix the problem. If he really spent 250,000pts here, he'd be a complete moron.

By asking a few more questions to the interface with the help of Xi, he ended up getting the information he wanted.

The Green Cube didn't heal by performing microsurgery or anything primitive and constraining. As with the food purchased from the Oracle Store, the Green Cube would scan the body, genome, and Aetheric Code for abnormalities, and then directly reconstruct the damaged part(s) using pure Aether as an energy source. This was a big part of the reason for the price.

Even during the scan, Jake could feel a presence comparable to the one he was emitting with his Extrasensory Perception. The only difference was that this supernatural presence was emitted by a machine.

Until now, no Earth technology had been able to detect the Aether presence, although his mind could easily do so. He sincerely wondered how the Oracle operated these inanimate machines to give them such an advanced Aether control.

In the end, he gave up on the Green Cube and came out a few minutes later after asking all the questions he could think of.