

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 190 - Almost

Kyle and Sarah were already waiting for him outside. Their wounds were many, but they could all heal on their own without leaving any after-effects, except for some nasty scars.

That was another Aether-related issue. Their vitality and metabolism was much better than before, but the healing process hadn't really changed. As soon as a wound was too large, spontaneous healing without adequate sutures would necessarily leave some unsightly traces on the scar tissue.

This was all the more true since the number of possible cell divisions by each cell was in principle limited. High Vitality was not a sufficient reason to be repeatedly injured. At least, as long as their genetics remained that of a human.

Stem cell culture, cell dedifferentiation using growth factors, 3D printing of skin or organs, or telomere elongation were all solutions that existed in theory in the 22nd century, but they were still expensive state-of-the-art technology.

Enya and Esya had also emerged from the Green Cube early on. Their injuries were the least severe and they were right now the poorest of the group except for Will. Jake didn't include his cat in the equation, since the cat's fortune was basically his.

The group of five inspected their respective wounds, which had not budged, before releasing a short but meaningful burst of laughter.

‘How much was it to heal your knees?’ Sarah asked him with an expression of concern that seemed sincere, although he couldn’t be sure with her excellent acting.

‘Too expensive for me, unfortunately. 27,800 points...’ Jake sighed, although he’s already come to terms with it.

With this first exchange, Kyles, Sarah and the two sisters shared the price of their healing. Kyle’s injuries were paradoxically more expensive than Jake’s, which confirmed the answers to the questions he had submitted to the System.

The Green Cube made little difference about the location or apparent severity of the injury. What mattered was the damage or more precisely the biomass to be reconstituted.

If a physical deformity needed to be restored, or lungs damaged by smoking for example, the Oracle simply charged for the creation of a healthy organ. There were a few subtleties, but that was basically the principle.

The Green Cube also applied a price scale according to the percentage of biomass damaged and the technicality it required to achieve healing. Even for the Oracle, healing a fracture or sunburn was still simpler than regenerating a brain or heart.

Nevertheless, the Green Cube seemed to apply a malus, quickly becoming exponential, if the damage suffered was too great. For example, if Jake had come back with no legs and no arms, he would have needed several million points, while if he only had his head left — by the greatest of miracles — he would have needed a billion points.

It was obvious to Jake and Xi that the Oracle was spending little Aether on the process. It was more a way to make a profit, but more

importantly to remind them that their lives had a price and that they had better take care of it.

There was only one circumstance where the Oracle System offered total healing and that was at the end of an Ordeal. Regardless of the physical condition of the participants, their bodies would be completely restored against a decrease in their Ordeal rating and credits.

Fmz ovu dazlo dmpz Oztufil, ovu Rut Cpgu jmpit usur lfsu ovuaz Impil, frt dmz ovmlu jvm tat rmo wuo vfsu f Impi, ovu zulatpfi fhoasaow md ovuaz gzfar. A gmtw hmpit ovur gu zuhmrloapout dzmq lhzfohv gudmzu ovuaz hmrlhamplrull jfl nuzqfruroiw tallanfout. Fmz ovu jufculo, ao jfl f qfoouz md luhmrtl.

Jake had no idea how much it cost the Oracle to resurrect them for free during these first Ordeals, but it couldn't have been that easy, or the price of the Green Cube for a complete recovery would never have been so high.

Now that it was clear to all of them that the Green Cube was far too expensive, it was time to move on to Plan B. Jake, Kyle and Sarah all three had something to bandage, clean and suture their wounds.

The two princesses had none of this, as the nobles of their world were used to using the Healing Mages for this type of situation. Only the poor used cloth bands or cheap alcohol to disinfect and bandage their wounds.

Since they were still wounded and did not want to suffer unsightly scars in the future, they decided to accompany Sarah to learn how to make their own stitches and bandages.

Kyle didn't know how to do stitches, but with his current Agility, he had enough dexterity to get by. If he really wasn't doing well, he would go look for Jake or Sarah.

They had exchanged the numbers of their booths in the Oracle Bunker and they could easily find each other thanks to their Shadow Guide. Jake had a higher Oracle Rank, but as long as he allowed his group to find him and as long as their intentions were not harmful to him, he would appear in their Oracle Paths.

Before the group split up to go about their business, Jake didn't forget to explain why he had saved them in the first place. As a good antisocial person, tact was the least of his worries and he believed in honesty. Jake didn't need to be sweet-talked about and he acted the same way with others.

The two sisters were slightly surprised and ashamed that they were worth less than a few crystals, but they were careful not to show it by demonstrating the etiquette instilled in them by their upbringing.

In retrospect, Enya even thought it was a rather good thing. If he had come to save them by claiming to be a hero, they would have found it even harder to believe, even if they hoped for it deep down inside.

'The 100 crystals I gave you as payment for your weapon were practically all I had. I must have about 20 left...' Enya confessed by brushing her hand through her hair to hide her embarrassment.

Jake was dumbfounded when he heard the translation through his bracelet. He had genuinely assumed that the young woman was rich when he had negotiated with her the night before the Ordeal. If he had known that those 100 crystals represented almost all of her fortune... Well, it wouldn't have made any difference.

But he would have felt a little guilty; though, not for long. Increasing his chances of survival was his priority then and still was today.

Listening to them, Esya remembered something.

‘It’s true that we don’t have many of the Red Crystals given to us by the Instructor, but we do have our jewels and a lot of precious stones.’ The younger sister revealed with a sense of pride that only the rich could boast.

Enya facepalmed in her mind, her face slightly red with disgrace. At least their foolish decision turned out not to be so useless.

Jake immediately regained his enthusiasm when he heard Esya’s words. He didn’t care much for their past mistakes. What mattered was that they had enough crystals to fix his overloaded Aether stats problem.

Then he remembered that they had lost their bag outside the Shelter when they were ambushed by their former soldiers, and couldn’t help but inquire where the jewels were.

‘In our booth at the Oracle Bunker.’ Enya confirmed with a smirk, knowing full well why he was asking this question.

‘ Phew... ‘ Jake relaxed visibly at the confirmation.

Uioaqfoui, vu eifrhut fo val cruul frt duio ovfo ovuw hmpit jfao. Tvu gmru vufiare vft fizuftw guepr. Tvuzudmzu, vu jmpit vfsu rm hvmahu gpo om gzufc val cruul fefar ad vu jfrouit ovu vufiare om ofcu nifhu nzmnuziw....

‘Well, I’ll take you girls home.’ Jake announced shamelessly. To get those crystals, he was willing to do anything.

Sarah raised an astonished eyebrow, but wisely decided not to say anything. Thus, it was decided that Jake would accompany the three girls to the two sisters’ cabins to get the crystals, while Kyle would go home alone.

Kyle had a strong feeling of being left out, but he foolishly thought it was the privilege of the powerful. His charm seemed to have no effect since his arrival in the Mirror Universe...

The group of five then made their way to the pyramid-shaped building containing the Oracle Bunker, and then parted once in the lobby, Kyle's solitary, slumped gait almost evoking their pity. Almost.