

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 196 – The Oracle Store

With his Aether reward in his pocket, Jake headed this time to the Oracle Store, or rather the giant Blue Cube. He hadn't forgotten the ambush of Yerode and Lamine which had almost cost him his life and he intended to investigate how those two bastards had done it.

The Blue Cube was another gigantic cube, which like the Red Cube had been placed in open air in the hollow of another building. The Red Cube was in the middle of the pentagonal building that housed the five Halls, while the Blue Cube stood on top of a ring-shaped building in an upright position, like the sapphire of a big ring.

The ring-shaped building had a very zany architecture, but by some miracle it held perfectly in place. No tilting or unbalancing, its walls having the same smooth carbon-grey texture as the other buildings.

Growing accustomed to the process, Jake pressed his palm against the Ring and the wall liquefied to form a vortex into which he readily entered. Inside, another large hall greeted him, looking very much like the Oracle Mission Hall.

The place was well lit, with other informative terminals, but stood out for the many human-sized Blue Cubes lining the walls. As always with the Oracle buildings, the space inside was much larger than the exterior view suggested.

Looking up at the ceiling, Jake could see veins of bluish light running through the structure and connecting to the many smaller

Blue Cubes at their disposal. There was no doubt that these Cubes were connected to the main giant Cube at the top of the Ring.

The ground floor of the Ring was currently empty with the exception of a few aliens and a young woman in a special force outfit who he recognized as the taciturn bodyguard of the Korean star Cho Min-Ho.

With her right hand lightly pressed into one of the Blue Cubes and her eyes closed, she was displaying a focused expression that could not hide her frustration. Jake didn't know what she was doing there and didn't care.

Choosing the nearest free Blue Cube about ten meters away from the young woman, Jake in turn placed his hand against the object, which sank slightly as if it had just touched a soft viscous substance with a plastic texture.

The System's notification he was familiar with appeared in his mind and a mental image comparable to the home page of an online shopping site materialized, occupying his entire vision. He understood better why the young woman had closed her eyes.

Jake found the categories that had been introduced at the end of his Ordeal when he was choosing his rewards:

[Auovuz/Guruoah Cmtu Ervfrhuqurol]

[Knowledge and skills]

[Aether Skills]

[Oracle Device Skills/Upgrades]

[Objects/ Machinery/Vehicles]

[Organic/inorganic materials]

What had changed, conversely, were the prices. The credits had been replaced by Aether points, and the first thing that jumped out was that everything was much more expensive. In fact, it was outright robbery!

Remembering that Enya and Esya's Fireball spell lv10 must not have cost them much more than 100 credits, Jake set out to find the corresponding Aether skill for comparison. The reality turned out to be far worse than he had ever imagined.

Instead of the 100 credits proposed at the end of the Ordeal, the same Fireball lv10 now cost 10M Aether points. It was so horribly expensive that he wondered who could reasonably buy these Aether skills except perhaps the most powerful factions.

He believed the Earth Government was capable of buying some of these Aether Skills for their most loyal and deserving soldiers, but knowing human nature, it was more likely that a few power-hogging tycoons would spend the hard earned Aether of their troops at their leisure.

Nm jmrutz lmqu nmjuzdpi Esmisuzl frt Pifwuzl vft gzmcur fjfw dzmq
Nuj Efzov om dmzq ovuaz mjr dfhoamrl fimre jaov ovuaz mjr
Fimfoare llifrtl. Ir val mnaramr, Cvm Mar-Hm lvfzut ovu lfqu
fqgaoamr.

To buy this Aether Skill on his own, Jake would need to survive at least 500 nights like the previous one. It was so preposterous that participating in the Ordeals appeared to be the most straightforward decision now.

The only consolation was that his Sergeant's Oracle Rank granted him a 5% discount. It wasn't much, but he could look forward to greater discounts in the future as he moved through the ranks.

This was once again an incentive to participate in the Ordeals. By finishing the 4th Ordeal and assuming he would not die in it, he was guaranteed to be at least Rank 8. He didn't know what military rank that was, but the price reductions in the Oracle Store might be interesting enough to make shopping worthwhile.

It also explained why the Earth Government troops were buying what they needed through their superior instead of going directly to the Oracle Store. The person with the highest Oracle Rank in the Earth Government was probably in charge of buying everything New Earth needed to keep costs down.

This gave the highest ranking Players and Evolvers a completely different stature, because their Oracle Rank made them invaluable just by their ability to cut costs. For example, for this Fireball lvl0 spell, a simple 5% reduction saved 500,000pts of Aether.

Digging around, it turned out that the two manuals he had bought for 300 credits didn't cost 30M as he had expected but 120M. The Novice Aether Manipulation manual alone cost 100M. As for his Myrmidian and Kinthar pure bloods, they were currently listed as 'out of stock'.

It was still possible to acquire them, but the Oracle System would be forced to synthesize them from its database. The theoretical cost was no longer 500M, but 5 billion Aether points.

'Fuck!' Jake cursed by dropping his signature swear word.

The Oracle was clearly manipulating the prices at its whim. The Oracle Store prices had the merit of being relatively constant, but the prices of the Ordeal rewards seemed to fluctuate depending on the Player concerned and his performance. Assuming that the Oracle Store was not in short supply, the Myrmidian and Kintharian pure blood that Jake got as a reward was worth a billion points!

Tval jfl wuo frmovuz hpu dzmq ovu Ozfhiu om urhmpzfeu ovuq om urouz ovu Oztufil fl lmmr fl nmllagiu. Jfcu hvuhcut om tuouzqaru ad ao jfl jmzov luiiare ovu ukhull Mwzqatafr frt Karovfzafz gimmt gfhc om ovu Ozfhiu Somzu, gpo ovu nzahu jfl f omofi lhfq.

A liter of pure blood was traded in for 1% of the original price. For the current Jake, this represented a colossal Aether fortune, but only if his life depended on it would he be willing to make such a stupid choice.

Now that he knew their value, his next plan was to go to Thelma to find a buyer and preferably an Aetherist. He was convinced that these two types of blood were enough to get the favors of one of them. If he couldn't find any, he would eventually sell some of his stock to the highest bidder, preferably someone in the Earth Government.

He then turned his attention to the Oracle device skills and the various upgrades available at his Oracle Rank. After scrolling for long minutes, he finally found several Oracle device skills and features that could explain how Yerode and Lamine had tricked him.

The first one was a skill called Oracle Cloaking. Only levels 0 and 1 were available for his Oracle rank and it was unlikely that the two mercenaries had access to anything better. By paying 100 Aether points per hour, it was possible for the holder of this skill at level 0 to disappear from the Oracle Paths of other bracelet owners as long as their Rank did not exceed their own. At level 1, the cost per hour increased to 200 points and it became possible to hide from someone with an Oracle Rank one rank higher.

The level 1 could extend its area of effect to other people within five meters of the user, but this increased the cost accordingly. Yerode and Lamine had therefore spent a minimum of 400 points to succeed

in the ambush. This might seem insignificant after a night like this, but it was still a considerable price to pay for a failed ambush.

The worst part was that such a cheat amounted to 10,000,000 Aether points for the lvl 0 version. It was expensive, like everything else the Oracle Store sold, but no more expensive than the Fireball spell lvl 0.

In other words, from the Oracle System's point of view, this kind of 'protection' was one of the most vague and easy to acquire optional features. The Oracle Cloaking lvl1 on the other hand was 10 times more expensive.
