

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 200 - Xi's Hologram

A powerful mind was nevertheless the key to attracting, controlling and manipulating more Aether. An Evolver with a powerful Soul could create an Aether Core in a fraction of a second, and not just inside his body. Aether Cores could also be used offensively.

Creating and selling Aether Cores was also a recognized craft in the Mirror Universe. With sufficient output, it could provide enough Aether to live comfortably in an Oracle City without doing anything.

It could also be used to provide power for the various vehicles, spaceships, and other Aether-based weapons. Creating an Aether Core was not simple for most people and time consuming. Therefore, a market speculating on this resource had naturally flourished over time.

This was the summary of the lesson, with the rest of it merely explaining how to proceed step by step to create an Aether Core. If he then wanted to learn how to use his Aether Core to cast some magic he would have to learn and practice the basic Aether Runes contained in the following chapters.

Mentally prepared for the long-term effort, Jake checked one last time to make sure he didn't lack anything. He had enough Digestor jerky left to last him for a few days and his bottles were full.

Upon learning how his bracelet was producing Aether, the first thing Jake tried was to control the Aether around him and insert it into his Aether Storage. Alas, it didn't work. The Aether floated around his

bracelet without ever disappearing inside. Only a fraction of that Aether was continuously absorbed to keep the Oracle device functioning.

[Don't bother, Jake.] Xi interrupted his attempt with a touch of pity.

[Your logic is good, but the Oracle would never let the Evolvers store the Aether from the atmosphere in the bracelet that easily. The Aether Storage is a technology similar to the force fields that line the walls of an Oracle City or Cube. The Oracle System has full power over what goes in and out. All the bracelet does is give you permission to access and draw freely from the storage.]

'I do wonder why I'm not even surprised...' Jake snorted without forgetting to insult the Oracle System for the umpteenth time.

'At least I'll be able to do whatever I want with my Aether Core...'

He suddenly thought of a contradictory detail in the second chapter.

'Xi, does the Aether Storage accept the Aether released continuously from the Aether Core?' Jake wanted to confirm his doubts.

[It would appear so...] She answered with a certain weariness in her voice.

'You know, Xi, it's tiring hearing you and not being able to see you. Sometimes I forget you're there.' Jake changed the subject unexpectedly. It had been on his mind for a long time.

'Why don't you create a virtual hologram with the appearance of your choice?' Jake proposed in his mind. 'When I was Rank 0 I could understand the reason, but I can even read virtual books now thanks to the bracelet.'

[...]

Xi remained silent for a few moments, then suddenly let go in a voice barely more audible than a whisper.

[I can't remember what I looked like back then. I don't even know if I was human or something else.] She confessed in a sheepish and miserable tone.

Jake understood her plight, but he saw a very simple solution to it.

'It doesn't really matter. Quite the opposite in fact. Your memories of the original Xi were taken away from you when you were created, so you can be considered a different person. Choose your own appearance. Even if you don't like it, you can change it whenever you want. '

[...]

[Sigh... I don't have any idea. Based on your personal tastes, I have a lot of archetypes to choose from, but it would prevent you from behaving normally in my presence.] The Oracle AI teased him out of the blue with a deliberately sultry voice.

Jake swallowed with difficulty, but admitted it was a good argument. A woman who was perfect by his aesthetic standards was definitely pleasing to the eye, but it could prevent him from reasoning calmly.

'If you only appear when I'm safe, I guess that's okay. 'He finally said. ' It might even be useful if you need to show me something personally or correct me. Just wear some clothes and I'll be fine. '

[Don't forget that I can only see and orientate myself through your senses. Even if I appear as a hologram, I won't be able to see you physically like you can see me with your own eyes. The image I have of you will also be artificial, so don't retract your Extrasensory Perception, it helps me a little.]

‘All right.’

Jake extended his mental perception field to its maximum, the Aether’s movements to a radius of about ten meters no longer holding any secrets for him. He just regretted that it was limited to the Aether, because otherwise it would have been the equivalent of having eyes in the back. He could still see the enemies behind him thanks to the flow of Aether in their bodies, but it was not comparable.

He waited patiently for Xi to decide on a satisfactory appearance, wondering what her hologram would look like. It made him curious to know what she would choose. Blonde, brunette, redhead, tall or short, white, yellow, brown, or black, Jake didn’t think he liked one type of woman better than another.

If a woman was beautiful, she was beautiful. Jake was most receptive to beauty and femininity in general.

At long last, a young woman wearing a futuristic full body suit covered with armor plates resembling polished black jade appeared in front of him causing him to flinch.

The young woman was absolutely gorgeous, but Jake noticed right away that she didn’t have much to do with the models on Earth that he remembered. She was about ten centimeters shorter than him and had a slender body with all the right shapes and curves in the proper place and proportion. Her black hair was rather short, stopping well above the shoulders, but that was the last thing normal about her.

The white of her eyes was replaced by black, while her irises were blood red with a kind of blaze inside. He would have gladly believed

her if she had pretended to be the hidden daughter of Emperor Palpatine, but Disney had decided otherwise...

Her slightly tanned skin was covered with fine veins of red light that could be guessed under her skin like a vast electrical network. Her scarlet nails looked varnished, but their refractive index was comparable to that of real rubies. There was no such varnish on earth.

On closer inspection he noticed that there were fine scales on her hands and neck that were indistinguishable from the rest of her body. As for her suit, it was extremely tight, following every curve of her perfect body. Had it not been for the armour plates on top, it would have been quite awkward for him.

‘Is this... the look you chose based on my taste?’ Jake was completely flabbergasted.

‘Am I so weird?’ He sincerely asked himself inwardly.

[Yes, I think so...] Xi confirmed with a hesitant tone. [This appearance came naturally to me.]

‘Well, human or not, I assure you that your appearance has nothing earthly about it. Perhaps you have more memories than you think.’

Xi’s hologram was totally inexpressive, as if she was still learning how to control her every expression but Jake could sense that she was happy to have retained a part of herself. Regardless, this new appearance would be hers from now on.

Jake was considering buying a drone with a camera that could be remotely controlled by his Oracle Device in the future so that Xi could walk around and see with her own eyes, but it wasn’t for today. Via the Oracle Store it would cost a small fortune, but New

Earth should be able to make this type of drone, even if it wouldn't be as good as the ones the Oracle could provide.

Now that he could talk to Xi face-to-face, she didn't seem so artificial to him anymore. Xi also seemed to feel better in this form, because she showed no sign of wanting to disappear when he sat cross-legged to get himself ready.

' Keep an eye on my Aether flow, Xi. In case something abnormal happens, stop me. ' Jake calmly instructed with his eyes closed.

[Sure.]

The purple and blue Aether sphere representing his mental field of perception appeared in Jake's mind, extending its influence as far away from Jake's body as possible, until he felt his mind tense up like a rubber band about to snap. Beyond that point he was blind and the Aether was unreachable.

Slowly he took control of the Aether around him as if it were his own, and the invisible energy flow slowly began to converge towards him.

His first attempt to create the Aether Core had begun.