

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 203 - Time to Leave

Just because Jake had agreed to go with Anya didn't mean he'd given up on his Aether Core. He was aware that at his current pace, creating a stable Aether Core could take several months.

It was a great training for his Spirit Body, but every day that he passed the Aether density on B842 was increasing substantially. After just one week, the density had exceeded 30 points. This was evidence that the Evolvers were progressing quickly and the surge in density each morning matched the time when the Players finished their Ordeal and left the Red Cube.

If he spent months training without hunting or participating in any Ordeal, he would soon be left behind. Although his training could not be neglected, there was a simple way to speed up the creation of the Aether Core and that was to increase his Extrasensory Perception and Intelligence.

And in order to do that, he had to solve the Aether limit issue.

He briefly explained his situation to Anya, asking her if she knew how to meet an Aetherist. To her confused expression, he understood that she wasn't familiar with the term, but when he explained what it meant she heaved a sigh of relief.

'Phew! I really thought for a moment that you already knew more than me.' She looked delighted to be able to play her role as an older cousin.

Jake rolled his eyes when he saw her reaction. As he was packing his things in his trusty backpack, she told him something that made him shudder with eagerness.

‘What you call Aetherist, there’s only one on Thelma that can be described as truly experienced and infathomable. It’s a small, crumpled alien looking like some kind of Gremlims with a long beard. Many have tried to enlist his services, but very few have succeeded. He’s a lunatic who doesn’t care about money or Aether and his prices are absolutely outrageous and totally based on the customer’s looks. I wouldn’t waste my time trying if I were you. ‘

Putting on his backpack, Jake activated the vortex to leave his cabin with his cousin. Due to repeated teleportations through the Orange Cubes, it was not practical to chat without being interrupted. As a result, the two cousins remained silent throughout their walk to the exit.

Once out of the Pyramid, Jake asked the question that had been on his lips for some time.

‘If you advise me not to waste my time with this guy, I suppose you have another solution? ‘

The corner of Anya’s lip rose slightly in response to form a subtle smile.

‘I’ve got one. ‘ She nodded, returning to her neutral expression, but it was obvious she was happy to be able to educate him about things he didn’t know. ‘The Earth Government has a few Evolvers and Players who’ve been on B842 for years capable of performing the genetic and Aetheric operations you’re looking for.

‘ I know what you’re thinking, but it’s reliable. Even on Earth, the technology is advanced enough with nanorobotics to transfer or

modify a person's genome. Ethically, it was limited to correcting minor genetic defects in those who could afford it, but the technology is perfected. It's just extremely expensive.

‘ Just like you, the Evolvers and Players serving the Earth Government value knowledge over Aether Skills for rapid power gain. Gradually, through group effort, the Government expanded its database and technology by acquiring multiple knowledge manuals for technologies they hadn't mastered. This knowledge is then manually copied by employees under a strict secrecy agreement and becomes available to the Evolvers or qualified personnel for an Aether fee or as a reward for their good and loyal service. ‘

Jake visibly slowed down when he learned that New Earth already had the textbooks for which he had spent all of his first Ordeal's credits. He sincerely wondered if he had not acted rashly in choosing these rewards.

‘I don't think your choice is wrong. I think you did well. ‘Anya reassured him when she sensed his tense expression.‘ First, you have to work for the Earth Government, and second, you have to have a proven track record before you can get access to that information. Even I, who've been in Earth special forces for a few months now, don't have access to those data. They provide us with a lot of stuff at low cost, such as the Aether Skills and Spells we need to support our squads, but these manuals are not part of it. ‘

Jake was deeply relieved to hear Anya's explanation. But then he replayed her last sentences in his mind and his face fell.

‘How long has she been in special forces? I thought she had a desk job before she was recruited on B842... No wonder she was often unreachable...’ He felt enlightened. You couldn't get into Special

Forces like that. She had to have prior military experience to be eligible for the job.

‘Do you want me to copy the first two chapters for you later? They’re not very long. ‘Jake offered in a sincere tone. To his cousin, he was willing to make a little effort.

The Oracle System forbade transferring purchased knowledge from one bracelet to another, but it didn’t prevent this information from being copied and then transmitted by other means. It was a relatively easy loophole to exploit, but only the big factions were willing to waste so much time copying these manuals. A lone Evolver simply didn’t have the time nor the will to be altruistic.

That was how Anya had transferred the contents of the English/Oraclean dictionary to him via a usb stick. An Evolver working for the Earth Government had bought the dictionary in question, which he then had to painstakingly copy onto a computer. After that, the dictionary could easily be transmitted to anyone via the internet or the use of usb flash drives. Even the bracelet did not refuse the information from a USB stick.

Anya showed a faint surprise when she heard his proposal, but it warmed her heart to see that he still trusted her after all her lies and omissions. She was still frustrated that he hadn’t picked up on the fact that she’d been working for the Special Forces for some time. She had planned a long tirade to justify herself that she would never get a chance to say.

Naturally, she readily agreed, although she suspected she would have to be patient.

‘You were saying that there are pseudo Aetherists and geneticists capable of doing the transgenic surgery I’m looking for on New Earth?’

Can I trust them?’ Jake went back to the subject he was interested in. He had a serious expression on his face this time.

It was Anya’s turn to slow down this time.

‘Yes, but not just anywhere on New Earth.’ She finally said solemnly. ‘Make sure you’re in the Oracle City compound when you make your request and they perform the bloodline transfer. Otherwise, there’s a real risk you’ll get tricked. They’ll probably charge you an exorbitant price, by the way... unless you agree to work for them.’

‘Not a chance.’ Jake growled sternly.

After that, the two cousins made their way to the Oracle Playground, the cylindrical building taller than a skyscraper. Jake was desperate to find out how Will was doing with the sale of the Digestor corpse, and he wanted at least one person to know that he was leaving. As for his cat, it was in the same direction as Will according to his Shadow Guide.

The two cousins continued to exchange banalities during the rest of the walk, especially about Uncle Kalen’s health and Anya’s work. His uncle was apparently doing just fine. He had regained his former rank of Colonel and had regained the vigor of his twenties thanks to the higher Aether density on Thelma.

The Wilderths were doing just as well on New Earth as on Earth and had managed to acquire a mansion in an Oracle City within the Oracle Playground large enough to house all their family members. The Oracle City in question was quite far from New Earth and required 50 Aether points each time to get there via a Yellow Cube, but it was still a great achievement.

Coming out of yet another Orange Cube, Jake and Anya appeared in the paved square where Jake and his group had visited their first

Oracle City a week earlier. They came face to face with Will and the felines who were about to return to the Shelter via the teleporter.

To Will' relaxed expression, he had accomplished his mission long ago, and must have reaped a nice payoff. The felines seemed to like him very much. Crunch was not far away with the female leopard, whom he had been harassing since their first encounter.