

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 205 - I'm pretty good at it, too.

Upon seeing the massive silhouette of the felines, most of the humans and other aliens in the central square of the Oracle City gazed up at them with curiosity or wariness. Will had the proud and complacent gait of a politician surrounded by his bodyguards. He had obviously become accustomed to getting such attention over the past week.

It wasn't Sarah, Kyle or Tim who noticed that Jake was there, but the two Princesses who were having a drink next to them. When they saw him approaching, they waved their cheerful hands to signal him to join them. Jake felt slightly embarrassed by their enthusiasm. He couldn't remember making such a good impression on them.

[Well, you just saved their lives when they thought they were going to be eaten by Digestors...] Xi scoffed.

Jake had to concede that it was a more than valid reason. The fact that he had also been injured and had 'sacrificed' himself to save them only reinforced the positive image they had of him. Despite his relative coldness and lack of tact, he was clearly the leading figure in the group.

[You want to woo them both? Having two sister princesses in his bed must be a fantasy that all men on Earth share, right?] Xi teased him again, apparently in a prankish mood today.

Jake's facial muscles tensed briefly upon hearing his AI's bad jokes, but he forced himself to act as if he hadn't heard anything.

‘It’s not really the time for that.’ Jake retorted drily to run away from the discussion.

‘How is it not the time? They can have a drink now and then to relax, can’t they?’ Will questioned him with a somewhat puzzled expression.

‘Nothing. I was just thinking about something else.’ Jake found an excuse when he realized he’d spoken out loud because of his nervousness.

He’d spent so much time worrying about how he’d survive the next day over the past few months that he hadn’t once thought about getting a girlfriend or having fun. With his current Player status it was actually more than easy to find a refugee or a Civilian looking for a powerful man.

The rest of their group was sitting on a terrace at the same tavern where Alima and Patrick spent most of their free time. Even when they were working, the restaurants and taverns in the central squares of the Oracle Cities were the perfect place to monitor inbound and outbound traffic and meet newcomers.

Since their meeting with Jake, the two soldiers had talked with many other Players and Evolvers. Some like Jake just wanted information, while others were joining New Earth and were willing to work or collaborate with the government.

Therefore, after realizing that this was a great place to meet people, they were allowed by their superior to stay here during their tour of duty and they were more than happy to do so. New Earth even provided them with a certain amount of Aether to make the newcomers feel comfortable by buying them food or drinks as required.

This was part of their ‘working expenses’ and that’s how the two soldiers paid the cocktail party for the rest of his group. According to Will, it was also because they had received a substantial bonus for acting as middlemen during the sale of the Rank 7 Digestor. That’s where their generosity came from.

‘Heh Heh, Jake, our golden goose!’ Patrick exclaimed, extending his hand towards him to introduce him to all the humans in the tavern.

Jake nodded to the other humans in the tavern before finding a chair to sit on. In the brief moment that he had stared at the tavern’s open-air terrace, he recognized some of the recruits that Cho Min-Ho had recruited, but also some new faces he had never seen before.

After all, one Oracle City in the Oracle Playground was connected to 100 Oracle Shelters. That there was more human traffic was normal, since this Oracle City was dedicated to humanoids of human appearance and size.

Once seated, the stares that weighed on him released their attention to resume their conversations. The felines were regularly entitled to anxious glances, but their placid attitude soon reassured the other customers.

‘May I serve you something?’ A drone floated in front of him to take his order.

Will agreed to have some tea, but Jake refused, true to his principles. Even though a few dozen points were still affordable for someone like him, he couldn’t bring himself to do so when he remembered that a cup of coffee was worth the Aether equivalent of four or five Rank 3 Digestors or a poor Rank 4 Digestor, which was about 30 points.

‘How you doing?’ Esya, the younger sister, asked with a thick English accent that could be cut with a knife. It was obvious that they had

made quite an effort to learn their language with the time they had spent with Sarah.

‘Fine.’ Jake replied in their own language. From the little his translator had translated he had retained enough words for that level of conversation.

Esya’s eyes widened slightly in surprise when she saw him answer in their native language, but she didn’t think it was so absurd either. Enya wasn’t shocked at all or she hid it well.

‘You were learning their language during that week?’ Kyle asked with an enlightened expression. ‘I should get into it too if I want to pick up alien girls.’

Sarah rolled her eyes at him, not even deigning to ruin his fantasies. The two sisters giggled politely, as the ladies of the nobility had learned to do so to remain politically correct in society. Maybe they just didn’t want to embarrass him.

‘I learned the Oraclean so I could translate a manual, yes.’ Jake promptly admitted, ignoring Kyle’s snide innuendo. ‘As for their language...?’

‘Velsyosic, but you’d say Velsyan in your own language. We come from the Velsyos Empire, from the planet Ega.’ Enya coolly explained.

‘Thanks. But I don’t speak Velsyan, just a few words I’ve heard and deduced.’ Jake supplemented in response to Kyle so that they wouldn’t overestimate him.

‘That’s pretty good.’ Sarah congratulated him in Oraclean this time.

Jake noticed she didn’t wear any makeup at all this morning, as if she’d decided she didn’t want to depend on her looks anymore. She

still looked beautiful in her natural state, but the change was noticeable. In comparison, the two princesses were perfectly dressed and made up, each wearing a satin dress as pale pink as their hair and adorned with many pieces of jewelry. In the middle of the tavern filled with Evolvers and Players in battle dress, they looked like two cosplayers.

By checking the dazed faces around the table, Jake was able to confirm that no one spoke the Oraclean here except him, Sarah and Will. All had obtained a dictionary from Alima and Patrick, but only the two of them had made learning the language a priority.

As for Will, it was expected and predictable, since he intended to create a functional business in the Mirror Universe. For Sarah the connection was less obvious. She was either more studious than he imagined, or she had bought a manual with her Ordeal credits, just like him. Either way, after the fight with the horde she had earned enough points to maximize her Intelligence so it was not such a big surprise.

He didn't go so far as to conclude, however, that the others had wasted their time. A lot could happen in a week and everyone had their own goals.

'I'm pretty good at it, too. ' Tim, the prepubescent child who hadn't said a word from the beginning, spoke suddenly in Oraclean and surprised everyone around the table.

Realizing that even a ten or eleven year old child had made the effort to learn the Mirror Universe language, the non-bilingual present felt painfully ashamed. As a matter of fact, Alima and Patrick only understood a few basic words, while Anya had hardly ever bothered to open the dictionary. It was on her to-do list, but the urge was never there.

After that, the group exchanged banalities by recounting anecdotes from their past, or by sharing their respective experiences and rewards from the first Ordeal. When it was Will's turn, he confirmed that he had indeed acquired a specific Aether Encoding to increase his Charisma.

This did not make him more beautiful or attractive to his interlocutors, contrary to Charm, but it did make him more impressive and convincing. He was also more likely to be trusted. According to Will's explanations, at a high level it could even have effects similar to hypnosis. His stats being too low, the effect of this Aether Stat was not yet visible, but he was confident of his choice.