

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 227 - The Asteroid Elinor VXIII

As far as the eye could see, a rocky, porous, greyish soil veined with patches that looked like some mysterious dark metal as black as oil. A distant star gave them its faint white light, which was no more intense than that of a full moon. The asteroid itself was rotating rapidly, the demarcation of the unlit side of the asteroid was rapidly approaching, while the sun was escaping in the opposite direction.

With the exception of this tiny or distant sun, the sky was starless, giving an icy and desolate atmosphere where life should not have been able to develop.

Once the surprise was over, Jake quickly acclimatized to his new sensations, vigilantly scanning the other 'astronauts' around him. He was far from alone. Thousands of people of human morphology were standing beside him, wearing the same silver spacesuits to ensure good visibility of their wearer.

The visor was not opaque and he recognized the intrigued faces of his family members as well as those of his own group. Lily and Tim were easily recognizable by their size.

In apnea since his arrival, Jake scanned his suit and the atmosphere of the asteroid as a precaution with his bracelet. As he expected, there was no breathable atmosphere on this asteroid. In fact, there was nothing to breathe at all, since there was nothing but a few cosmic particles and a magnetic field probably generated by the asteroid itself.

Checking the scan report of his spacesuit afterwards, he was relieved to discover that it produced air that was perfectly breathable for Earthlings and that there was enough oxygen to last for several months, even while being extremely active.

Several blue cylinders reminiscent of the Blue Cube from the Oracle Store were inserted into his breastplate and were releasing oxygen steadily while maintaining constant levels inside the suit. To contain that much oxygen, the space inside had to be considerable and certainly profited from the Oracle's space technology.

Yet there was something strange about the atmosphere of this asteroid. The Aether density was fluctuating oddly, sometimes at 40 as the introduction of the Ordeal promised, sometimes so high that he was breaking out in a cold sweat.

Searching for the cause of this phenomenon, Jake finally noticed a four-armed humanoid figure more than four meters tall, which he had unconsciously ignored until then. It was almost invisible, its obsidian-colored suit blending into the dark sky as it floated a few meters above them.

Most of the participants present were totally unaware of the creature's presence. As time went by and they saw neither the Oracle Guardian nor structures resembling the Sanctuary Bubbles they were supposed to reach, more and more Players began to peer into the desolate world around them in search of a clue.

Those like Jake, who had spotted the one who was to be their guide, remained silent and pretended they hadn't noticed anything. Who knew if this supposed Oracle Guardian was hostile to them?

As more and more people became aware of the presence of a giant alien above them, the commotion began to dry up and the participants looked up at the mysterious presence that gazed upon them with indifference.

Following the gaze of their comrades, the slower ones finally looked up in the right direction as well, but even then they couldn't make out anything in the middle of the dark sky.

As if the alien knew that no more Players would spontaneously notice his existence, a deep voice, shaking their suits and bones, resounded in Oraclean, reaching even the most distant ones thunderously. Under an almost irrepressible injunction, all eyes this time pointed in the right direction, where the humanoid creature was hidden.

Disabling the camouflage function of its armor, a silver combat suit comparable to theirs, but heavily weaponized and reinforced, was revealed to them. Thousands of incomprehensible runes adorned each piece of armor with a modest bluish glow. Only the visor remained completely opaque, preventing them from distinguishing the face of the alien underneath.

To many, these runes were a mystery, but Jake was familiar with these symbols. They were Aetheric runes, and although he didn't recognize all of them, he knew most of them after he had finished reading his manual on Aether manipulation.

‘Welcome to the Asteroid Elinor VXIII. ‘ The Oracle Guardian greeted them warmly. ‘ I'm the Oracle Guardian Nimaalar, but you can call me Nima. I will be your guide to the nearest Sanctuary Bubble and will answer any of your questions.

‘Any questions? ‘

Despite the apparent warmth and friendliness in the alien's tone, his last question seemed more rhetorical than anything else. The Oracle Guardian clearly didn't want to be disturbed and regarded the reception of these newbies as a chore.

Gasur ovu omru md ovu Gpfztafr, rm mru tfzut om flc frwovare, usur ovmpev ovuw fii vft f imo md ypuloamrl mr ovuaz qartl.

‘In this case, let’s get going. ‘ The giant alien yawned in a dull tone. ‘ Don’t move more than fifty meters away from me. ‘

Before they had time to wonder why, the Oracle Guardian had already ditched them and was floating a few kilometers an hour in a certain direction. Jake took the recommendation at face value and calmly began to walk in pursuit of the alien with his group on his heels.

‘What difference does it make if we get more than fifty meters away? ‘A not-so-smart Player whispered to the comrade next to him.

‘Shut up and walk! I don’t want to find out. ‘A woman’s voice replied curtly behind him.

‘AAAAAAAAAAAAARRRGH!!!! ‘

A few minutes later, the participants got the answer to this mystery. An alien who was clearly intellectually limited was lost in thought and had retained nothing of the Guardian’s warning. Captivated by the sidereal void around him, he had naturally found himself lagging behind.

No sooner had the alien moved more than fifty meters away than a terrifying pressure crushed him from all sides, crushing his armor and vaporizing his flesh and bones. The suit itself began to melt and then disintegrate, forming a new metallic patch on the asteroid’s surface.

Breathlessly, the Players who witnessed the scene sprinted to position themselves directly beneath the Oracle Guardian, jostling anyone who hadn’t been able to witness the scene.

Jake hadn't missed anything of what had happened, but he couldn't figure out why. If it was gravity, the armor wouldn't have melted and they themselves would be in a terrible state. If it was the temperature, it didn't make sense either. As for pressure, there was no atmosphere that could generate such an effect.

Duouqzarut om aturoadw ovu zuflmr, vu qmsut om ovu uteu md ovu Ozfhiu Gpfztafr frt lhfrut ovu flouzmat guwmrt ovfo arsalagiu iaqao. Tvu duutgfhc dzmq ovu gzfhuiuo omit vaq ovfo ovuzu jfl f dmzhu dauit iull ovfr f quouz ar dzmro md vaq frt ovfo ao jfl qmsare fo ovu lfqu nfhu fl ovu Ozfhiu Gpfztafr. Tvu zunmzo md ovu laopfoamr mr ovu movuz latu iudo vaq tuuniw lvfcu.

[Aether Density: *186,457 or 186.457M pts]

[Gravity: *53,457]

[Temperature: 36,387°C]

'What the hell?!' Jake was so shocked, he almost let the Oracle Guardian get away from him.

Those values were totally insane. A torrent of Aether reigned over the void on the other side of that force field. After trying to create his Aether Core for days, Jake was well aware of the Aether limits his body could withstand.

An Aether density of 10 or 20,000 points was already causing him a little pain. He couldn't imagine what would happen if he exposed himself to a density of several million, but he would probably end up in the same state as the poor idiot on the outside who had just dissolved.

Deeply shaken, he too hastened to hide under the reassuring shadow of the Oracle Guardian. He shoved a lot of people in his way, but at

least he knew why he was doing this. Without the alien floating above them, they would all be dead already!

‘What happened? ‘Will worried when he saw how upset he was.

Under the worried and curious gaze of his companions, he whispered to them what he had just discovered. As they learned the terrible truth, each of them was horrified. The participants listening close to them moved decisively closer to the Guardian after that.

George and Brice refused to believe it, but after doing their own test, they had to face the facts. Their expression was much less optimistic after confirming Jake’s words.

After a while, the clustered participants suddenly realized that the pace of the Oracle Guardian had begun to pick up. No Sanctuary Bubble was still visible and the asteroid had already completed three rotations on itself, with day and night following one another several times in less than half an hour.

Amusing and intriguing at first, the phenomenon was beginning to make them dizzy.

The pace changed from a leisurely pace to brisk walking over the next hour, and then to a slow jog. Soon the group of Players were running at a breakneck pace to the ever-accelerating Oracle Guardian, which floated above them with an indifferent expression, as if it could levitate like this until the end of time.