

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 229 - Record

The Sanctuary Bubble was several tens of kilometers in diameter and had the appearance of an enormous drop of liquid mercury. Its surface texture undulated and distorted like the surface of an ocean under the influence of currents and winds.

The Oracle Guardian that guided them finally slowed down until they were close to their starting pace. Like an airliner guided through an airport, he sailed among the millions of Players until he found a vast open space that seemed to have been reserved for them from the start.

Upon arriving at their destination, Jake expected to meet all sorts of more or less human aliens in the neighboring groupings, but he was startled to find that he was able to recognize some of the languages. Some of the participants were chatting in English, Chinese, or Spanish. All kinds of languages that he did not speak, but whose sounds he recognized. Of course there were extraterrestrial languages, but not that many.

The proportion of earthlings was in the order of 5-10%. By analyzing the Players they had just traveled with, he noted that there was indeed the same proportion of Earthlings. Because they spoke less, it just took him a while to realize it.

Eavesdropping to spy on the conversation in the nearby crowd, he intercepted a conversation that gave him some answers about the current situation.

‘Are you filming?’ A man with a strong Vietnamese accent asked another more wiry man next to him. ‘These second Ordeal recordings fetch high prices on the outside.’

‘I’ve been filming all along.’ His comrade snorted with apparent disdain.

‘Well, keep going.’ The first man replied bluntly.

Scanning the other men and women in spacesuits standing next to them, Jake noticed that they formed orderly rows and that their actions were extremely cautious and synergistic, as if they’d all known each other for a long time, or were at least accustomed to these risky missions.

‘New Earth government lackeys.’ His cousin George, unsolicited, began to explain the situation to all of them. ‘The Oracle device stores all our information and memories and can also record what we see with our eyes. With the Oracle device skill ‘Record’, it is possible to transfer what we see and hear, but also to resell these recordings. There is a large market for this in the Evolver and Player Hall.’

Jake remembered that George had studied to be an analyst. Logically, there was a good chance that he worked for the government or had worked for the government in the past. No wonder he knew so much.

‘What’s the point of them filming this?’ Elijah, their youngest uncle, asked the question that everyone was wondering about. His kind tone made it difficult to put him off.

Of course, these recordings may be valuable, but in today’s context they provided very limited information.

‘You have to know that everything, even we, has a price in the Oracle Store.’ George whispered. ‘For just under five years, we have diplomatic immunity that prevents aliens from other planets from

treating us like commodities, but that doesn't mean that no information about us is marketable.

‘This is especially true if the person seeking information about you has a higher Oracle Rank. Accessing your Ordeal results, identifying your rewards, your skills, or what you ate this morning is extremely simple for these people, as long as they have enough Aether. The amount of Aether required is usually a deterrent and no one would go broke for new Players like us. New Earth is no exception.

‘That's where these cameramen come into play. With this bracelet feature, they can resell the footage from their Ordeal or simply transfer it to their government for free. I guess that's how Grandpa got all this information and why he felt our results would be impossible to hide.’

Immersed in his reflections, Jake admitted that there was some truth to what his cousin had said. They had been running for hours on this asteroid and there had been only two deaths in their group out of several thousand participants. This completely invalidated the results disclosed by his grandfather or those of Vincent and Anya.

This could only mean one thing: the Ordeal itself had not yet started. It would start when they entered this bubble and those who were filming monitored each of the passages, as if their own Ordeal was of no importance. The many Oracle Guardians were probably recording everything that was going on as well, transferring their report directly to the Oracle System.

As if to confirm their suspicions, they noticed that from time to time a figure bolder than the others would venture alone to the Sanctuary Bubble and vanish inside in the same manner as when they entered a Red Cube.

Likewise, other silhouettes were regularly expelled from the Bubble. These were too far away for them to judge their expression, but judging by their disoriented movements and trembling, they had gone through a traumatic experience.

In no hurry to make a spectacle of themselves, their group continued to observe the situation for the next hour. A few groups of latecomers led by an Oracle Guardian ended up occupying the few vacant areas that remained and some of those who were already there entered the Bubble in their turn.

Wfohvare ovu urozfrhul frt ukaol hfzudpiiw, Jfcu darfiiw rmoahut f nfoouzr. Mmlo md ovmlu jvm urouzut ovu Bpggiu juzu fhopfiiw ubuhout dzmq ao jaovar dasu qarpoul.

It took him some time to verify this phenomenon, because the incoming and outgoing participants were too far away, but confirmation was instantaneous as soon as members of their own gathering started to try their luck.

A second interesting phenomenon was that those who came out of the Bubble prematurely were temporarily left alone, but once these Players regained their minds, an Oracle Guardian would come and throw them out of the protective force field.

Whether by telekinesis or physically, these poor Players would end up projected into the cosmos at the speed of a comet, their bodies disintegrating in a fraction of a second. Because there was no atmosphere, there was no noise or shockwave to shake the audience during these demonstrations of power, but the effect was no less terrifying.

Clearly, the Ordeal was over for these guys.

On the whole, the majority of the Players present were peaceful, but there were still moments of friction from time to time. Every time a fight broke out, an Oracle Guardian would exterminate the culprits the same way they eliminated the guys coming out of the Sanctuary Bubble. Soon, no one dared to create any more strife.

Very rarely, some of the individuals who entered would not come out. They had successfully passed the critical phase of the second Ordeal.

Jake still became aware of a flaw in the strategy of these cameramen. Since they too were participants, they would have to enter sooner or later. They couldn't botch their Ordeal, because after a failure, they were immediately expelled by the Oracle Guardian.

Since they wore spacesuits that they could not take off and had no food to sustain them, this naturally meant that their time was counted. He didn't know how long these cameramen could survive on this asteroid, but his intuition was that the Oracle Guardians would not let these Players stay passive for that long. Sooner or later, they would be forced to go in.

When Jake became aware of this limit, some of the burden on his shoulders immediately disappeared. With the exception of the Oracle Guardians and those willing to pay the price, it would be impossible to determine exactly how long he had lasted from the moment he survived inside long enough.

According to the Ordeal's setting, it was a Battle Royale, but the fact that they were not forced to enter at the same time meant that the immediate threat inside was not the other Players.

Those who returned prematurely from the Sanctuary Bubble were often disoriented and terrified, or even outright traumatized. So there was something horrible waiting for them on the other side immediately after they entered.

Jake continued to rack his brains for a few more minutes, his frown only getting worse as time went on. Then suddenly he burst out laughing.

He was a Myrtharian now. No matter the challenge in front of him, he would rise to it! Those who dithered in front of this Bubble were only giving a head start to those who had entered before them.

‘I’m going in. ‘Jake announced to his companions and cousins in a resolute tone.

As if his group was waiting for some kind of signal, they all took a deep breath and started walking along with him.

‘We’re all going together. ‘Will said with a solemn expression...

‘Bring it on!’ Kyle shouted to give himself courage. His face suggested he was about to burst into tears.

Sarah, the two sisters and Tim nodded and walked behind them with no further ado, leaving Jake’s uncle and cousins behind.