

The Oracle Paths

Volume 4: The Purgatory

Chapter 363 - Poor Again

Because of Kyle's pitiful performance during his previous Ordeal, he was the only one who didn't buy a Floating Island with the others. Instead, he had decided on its future location.

For Tim and Esya, although they could afford a basic Floating Island, they didn't have enough resources to develop it. Just the terraforming, the anti-radiation force field and stellar objects, and a breathable atmosphere and temperature would cost them too much Aether and leave them in a precarious situation.

That's why after buying and placing their Floating Islands, they planned to leave them vacant for the time being, until their Aether Storage reserves were strong enough.

Consequently, apart from Jake who intended to go to his Floating Island alone, Tim and Kyle had chosen to accompany Will, while Esya would live with her sister. Only Sarah had chosen to go alone. In any case, their Islands would be next door to each other.

Returning to the top of the tower where the Yellow Cubes were located, what most struck Jake and his group was the emptiness and silence. After this morning's state of emergency, the towers had been temporarily deserted and transportation had been suspended. In fact, they had to wait for the cannons to stop roaring before they were allowed to enter.

The old alien in rusty armor who had been chatting with Jake and answering his questions nodded at them, but with his gloomy face and dried silver blood staining his face and armor he was not in the mood to engage in conversation. The battle must have been tough and a few of the soldiers who had been guarding the tower previously were missing.

Jake and his group approached the nearest Yellow Cube and paid the 300 Aether points required for teleportation. Perhaps it was because their Floating Islands were far from Thelma or that the Aether density had increased slightly in a few hours, the Aether Fee was more expensive than this morning.

"I fear the worst..." Will grimaced after placing his hand against the cube's surface. "I absolutely have to start my business to secure a steady stream of Aether or our lives could become a living hell before long..."

Jake wanted to retort that they were much richer than the vast majority of Earthlings and that they had nothing to complain about, but Will had already vanished.

It didn't matter. Jake let his comrades pass before him, then calmly paid the Aether Fee and disappeared too, leaving Thelma far behind.

When his eyesight stabilized again, an unimaginable vision greeted him: Utter darkness or very close to it. Except for the faint radiance emanating from his Yellow and Blue Cubes, it was pitch black. For a moment he felt as if he had returned to the Red Cube.

Except that here he could still feel his body, and he could feel how the air was being forced out of his lungs because of the vacuum. Without using his telekinesis, his lungs would have emptied in an instant.

Jake was still wondering this morning whether Thelma's sky was an illusion or not and he finally had his answer. His tiny Floating Island was bathed in an ocean of darkness and that was what he was supposed to see.

B842 being several billion light-years away and only 20 years old, the light from this planet had not yet reached this place. It was normal that this area of emptiness was so dark.

After a few seconds, his vision finally acclimatized and he eventually noticed the distant glow of a few stars. It was extremely faint, but enough to put his mind at ease.

Indeed, his real surprise was that the sky was practically empty which also confirmed that before B842 there was barely anything at all here or so. Or maybe the nearest stars and galaxies were so far away that their light could not be detected with the naked eye.

On the other hand, the cosmic radiation was exceptionally powerful. His Status indicated that his body was constantly being hit by rains of neutrinos and gamma rays, proof that there were other celestial bodies in the vicinity and that sight was not a reliable sense. Without his Myrtharian Body and his innate ability to absorb this radiation, he would have died in a matter of minutes.

[There are other artificial planets like B842 that are massive enough to be seen from the sky of your Floating Island, but like B842 they are too recent]. Xi explained serenely, perceiving his doubts. [Since they are even more distant, their light has not reached this place either.]

Now that Jake had satisfied his curiosity, he did not intend to remain in the dark forever. Fortunately, even without any heat or light, it was not cold. Without an atmosphere, he could only lose his body heat through radiation, and although in its absence the island would eventually reach abysmally low temperatures, he still had time.

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The three robots had five pairs of adherent legs, some sort of motors in their backs to propel themselves into the vacuum of the universe, and multiple arms that could take the shape of all sorts of tools. A round sphere about a meter in diameter stood above all these pairs of legs, resembling an Oracle Drone. Jake was almost certain that the sphere could separate from the other parts of the robot and fly freely.

"Hello master, I am Alpha 48X96 what are your orders?" One of the Oracle Constructors asked politely by communicating mentally via the Oracle System. Because of the void, no sound was possible.

"Any suggestions Xi?"

[Hmmm, you have 400M of Aether points left. You're not like Will, you don't need to turn it into a hospitable environment. In the future, you can reserve a suitable section for guests. The ideal would be rather to transform this Floating Island into an impregnable fortress for your training.]

"I was thinking the same thing." Jake chuckled with excitement.

His only hesitations were because he still wanted normal humans like his uncle or Will to visit his Island one day, but with Xi's suggestion it was not an issue. Although it was not the priority at the moment.

To avoid the slightest accident, Jake had locked his Yellow Cube. No one was able to visit him for the moment, not even his friends.

Remembering that their Floating Islands were supposed to orbit not far from his own, Jake walked to the edge of his Island and actually found three other Islands a few kilometers below his own. The three Yellow Cubes were like three lighthouses in the dark. If he wanted to, he could fly to them in seconds.

At a glance, he noticed that a spherical shield had been erected around these islands, making him understand that his companions were safe.

BOOM!

As if to remind him that this was not his case, his island rocked violently, the disc-shaped base almost flipping over on itself like a pancake. If he didn't have such good reflexes, he would have been ejected into space.

"What the hell?!" Jake cursed as he struggled to stand upright.

Looking behind him, he discovered that an asteroid a few meters in diameter had hit the metal base of his Floating Island. Whatever the material of this disc was, it was hard. While the asteroid had been smashed to pieces on impact, the metal floor had not even been scratched.

[Oranium.] Xi said curtly in response to his surprise. [Simply tempered steel in older systems where the aether density is much higher than here.]

Jake walked to the debris of the asteroid and tried to control it with his Earth Control but he quickly gave up. With the exception of dust and some metal-free fragments, he was unable to manipulate these ores.

In any case, he had been able to verify the presence of a vague Aetheric signature and that was enough to give him hope. If he could not feel the arrival of these meteorites with his Spirit Body he would have immediately abandoned his plans and bought a powerful force field for his Island. At least he wouldn't die from being crushed by an asteroid unless it was too big or too fast.

[Forget it.] Xi mercilessly doused his confidence. [An asteroid usually moves at more than ten kilometers per second. In the Mirror Universe, the speed of meteorites and comets can vary greatly. You're lucky that asteroid missed you or you'd be dead already.]

Jake didn't object. He knew she was right.

According to Xi, what was most complicated with a new Floating Island was not the dust winds or meteor showers, but terraforming. Most people didn't go through the Oracle Store for this step and usually chose to obtain the necessary raw materials by other means.

If it was just soil or fertilizer that was needed, it wasn't too complicated, you could bring it in from somewhere else. But growing plants or trees took time. Standard terraforming using conventional technologies without going through the Oracle Store could take hundreds of years.

Although the inorganic material was of no value to the Oracle System, anything purchased from the Oracle Store was unusually expensive. An asteroid like the one that had just hit

his island was worth several hundred thousand points if bought directly from the Oracle Store.

In order for New Earth to develop to this point, astronomical resources had been invested in the Island and this had only been possible with the assistance of Evolvers and Players of the highest level. Indeed most of them had large Space Storage, which allowed to maximize the transfer of resources via the Yellow Cubes.

This was the reason why all the trees growing on New Earth were still young. A few years were not enough for the vegetation to develop to maturity. The few mature trees had been transplanted directly from Earth.

After doing a few more tests, discussing all the details with Xi and inspecting his extensive territory of 1000 square meters, Jake executed his plan.

First, he spent 300M of Aether points to install a detection system. His heart bled when his Aether evaporated from his wristband, but it was an absolutely necessary investment. Without it, he was gambling with his life and he hated to entrust his fate to chance.

It was the ultimate detection system, working like a scan of his bracelet. A high grade Aether Core was already powering the device and could perform a scan with a range of 50,000km radius every hour. The device could also detect gravitational waves and other distant radiation and infer the presence of anomalies.

This was enough to give it time to prepare for most threats. These asteroids were valuable resources and he had no intention of avoiding them. On the contrary, he wanted to multiply the odds of impact.

Therefore, an additional 50M Aether pts were spent to increase the surface area by another 50,000 square meters. After these changes, his Floating Island barely exceeded 250 meters in diameter and he realized that it would cost him far more resources than he was willing to spend.

He also installed artificial gravity and a breathable atmosphere for a few more points. A real contraption capable of this feat would have ruined him, but the Oracle System allowed them to pay a few points each day for this service. For small Floating Islands, it was worth it.

Waov ovu nmarol vu vft iudo, vu arourtut om qfcu f duj ozanl gfhc frt dmzov mr ovu B842 om gzare ovu qfouzafil vu ruutut om gear ouzzfdmzqare frt mnoaqaxu val ozfarare.

He was about to make his first-round trip on B842 when his new detection system performed its first scan. How surprised he was when he discovered that he and his friends were not as alone as he had first thought.