

The Oracle Paths

Volume 5: The Last Tutorial

Chapter 531 - New Members

‘So, Grash, what’s waiting for us outside? It’s time for you to tell us what you know about this Dungeon Digester.’ Jake inquired grimly after leaving the reassuring walls of the Black Cube behind them.

After leaving the Oracle Shelter, the four factions had found themselves in a barren forest covered with ash and ferns of the same dull gray. As an outsider, Jake could have seen it as just another alien ecosystem, but from the locals’ anxious faces, it was definitely not normal.

Their only consolation was that they hadn’t been attacked yet. The Digestors that had raided the Oracle Playground and infested their Shelter were nowhere in sight when they should have been rampant in their own territory.

From what Will had gleaned while chatting, there was still a lush forest a few days ago. Oxygen levels had also seriously dropped, making physical exercise difficult for normal humans and aliens. Some were already experiencing dizziness and hallucinations after walking a few hundred meters outside the Black Cube.

Without the protection and camouflage of the Oracle Shelter, the collective mood had become unnaturally gloomy and a heavy silence had set in, with only the gasping wheezing of the refugees to be heard. For some of these civilians, this was the first time they had left the Shelter since taking refuge there. If circumstances permitted, they would never have taken such a risk.

‘***** Goddamn Oracle System!’ Grash ranted audibly after spouting a string of unintelligible syllables.

It had been a long time since Jake had witnessed the Oracle’s almighty censorship.

‘Don’t tell me it’s because I didn’t finish my Fourth Ordeal yet?’ Jake wondered.

‘I’m afraid so...’ Grash chuckled awkwardly. ‘Hurry up and finish your Fourth Ordeal so we can talk normally...’

Jake’s lip twitched slightly as he heard the alien complain. Given their current situation, there was something totally absurd about the Oracle System’s censorship.

‘Xi, can’t the Oracle make an exception when these kinds of exceptional incidents occur?’

It had been a while since his AI had spoken, but she replied in a jaded tone,

[I’m afraid not. As long as your life is not in immediate danger, I doubt the Oracle will agree to change its protocols. And since the Oracle is blind here and is being interfered with, it is obviously unable to correctly predict what is in store for us.]

Grumbling in frustration, Jake looked back to Grash and suggested,

‘At least tell me where you think they are headed? Why do these three leaders seem to know exactly where they are going? I don’t get the impression they’re looking for the exit.’

Will and Svava’s eyes gleamed with curiosity as they heard his question. They were wondering exactly the same thing.

‘They might not be looking for a way out.’ The giant pig-like humanoid conceded halfheartedly.

Jake’s face scrunched up hearing that.

‘If they aren’t looking for a way out, why are we following them?’ He was rightly incensed.

Grash turned livid as he thought about the real reason behind their behavior.

‘Because sometimes it’s less dangerous to walk into the wolf’s mouth than to run away from it...’ He replied evasively.

Jake didn’t insist any further with his questions. He understood that this was the limit of what Grash was allowed to tell them. Calling to Will, he ordered,

‘I want the map of the Oracle Shelters and Cubes nearby where we are.’

‘It’s as good as done. I figured you’d ask me that.’ The businessman smiled as he transferred a file to him through his wristband.

Inspecting the relatively complete map of the surrounding area, Jake became thoughtful as he studied the layout of the Shelters. He knew even before his First Ordeal that no matter where he was located on B842 there would always be an Oracle Shelter or a Red Cube within 200km.

Today he knew that they were usually arranged in a square, with an Oracle Shelter at each corner and a Red Cube in the wilderness placed right in the center of that square. This pattern repeated itself identically on the entire surface of the planet, including in the so-called non-living areas.

The information that was new to him was that 9 of these squares made up of four Shelters and a wild Red Cube formed together a larger square called region in the center of which stood the famous Oracle Cities of the Oracle Playground which they accessed using Orange Cubes.

The Oracle Playground's secure territory was also camouflaged by a huge Black Cube, but unlike the Oracle Shelters established on the ground, this Black Cube orbited in space a few hundred kilometers above. The security measures were also much more advanced, making these places of leisure almost impregnable fortresses.

If the Digestors had not used the infiltrated Shelters' Orange Cubes to reach the Oracle Playground's dimension, it would never have fallen under Digestor control. There was no doubt that those responsible would be heavily punished once this fiasco was resolved.

In short, escaping from here was theoretically not difficult if they knew where the Digestors' territory ended. Dungeon Digestor or not, its size and number of subordinates had to be limited. Assuming that the Digestors behind this invasion came from the inhospitable area to the West, it made sense to flee to the East.

Tval jfl rmo ovu tazuhomr Bvpxcmh frt ovu movuz dfhoamr iuftuzl juzu vuftare ar...

Dejected, Jake decided to trust Grash and those other Fourth-Ordeal Players on this one.

'Help! Please, she needs help!'

Shouts of distress brought him back to the present moment. Glancing in the direction of the noise, he saw an ugly alien resembling some kind of strange goblin supporting a similar alien of smaller stature. Possibly his wife.

Refugees of all races had long since learned to gibber in Oraclean to make themselves understandable, but as weak Civilians they did not have the stats of other Evolvers. Their intelligence varied greatly from species to species and not all of these aliens had a natural talent for languages.

In this case, this goblin had a choppy accent that made his gibberish almost incomprehensible. If Jake couldn't discern his electrical and Aetheric fluctuations, he probably wouldn't be able to understand anything at all.

Crouching down without a word next to the passed-out female alien, Jake scanned her with his mental sense and impassively diagnosed, 'Exhaustion, malnutrition and severe hypoxia. She needs rest.'

'If we stop, we'll get left behind by the other factions.' Kyle shook his head as he saw that several other refugees were also about to collapse.

'Should we give them a chance?' Will offered nonchalantly with a slanted look of heavy meaning.

'We don't really have a choice.' Jake sighed. 'It's either that or losing half the refugees within the next hour. I wonder how the other factions are planning to handle this.'

'Very well. So be it.' Will nodded placidly.

The next second, all the refugees received a notification in their bracelets, or rather an invitation.

[You have been invited by Vice-Leader Will Hopkins to join the Myrtharian Nerds faction. Do you accept ? Yes or no ?]

Aside from the ridiculous faction name, the refugees didn't have much time to ponder the pros and cons. Their situation was critical,

and for outcasts like them to join a faction was more than they could possibly hope for.

The old man and the hustler accepted the invitation without blinking an eye, followed immediately by the redheaded prostitute and the balding man's group. After validating their choice, their bodies suddenly seized up, their eyes almost popping out of their heads.

Their reaction momentarily scared the other refugees who had not yet validated their choice, but they yelled in excitement and shock at what happened next. The old man's wheezing and cyanotic complexion disappeared almost instantly.

Straightening up, the old man walked a few steps, then to everyone's surprise threw a few jabs and kicks that made the air hum before muttering with emotion,

'My limp is gone... It's like I'm 20 again... No, I'm even stronger!'

The prostitute and the balding man experienced the benefits of a similar remodeling.

'How magical!' The redheaded former lawyer marveled before urging her two sons to accept the invitation. 'Come on hurry!'

Suquare ovfo bmarare oval dfhoamr vft mriw ftsfrofeul, ovu zudpeuul fgfrtmrut ovuaz zuiphofrhu frt vfnnaiw fhhunout. Tvu emgiar vplgfrt omme ao pnmr vaqluid om fhhuno ovu arsafoamr dmz val dfarout jadu, jvm jmcu pn f duj luhmrtl ifouz.

Watching with amusement as the refugees were ecstatic about their new physical abilities and the specifics of their Faction Skills, Jake couldn't help but bust up the mood,

'A gift like this comes with a lot of responsibility.' He stated sternly. 'If your life wasn't in danger the moment you left the Shelter, I would never have allowed such a concession. I would have let you prove

yourself by watching you for a long time before making my decision. Most of you might have died, but I have neither the time nor the inclination to help ungrateful people who will not hesitate to betray me as soon as the wind changes. Some of you... are just that kind of people. Maybe you are spies for the other factions or slaves left here against your will to monitor us.

‘It doesn’t matter. If you betray my trust, you die. If you disobey my orders, you will be kicked out immediately with no chance of pardon. Think carefully about your actions from now on.. It’s not every day in life that you get a second chance.’