

# The Oracle Paths

## Volume 2: The First Ordeal

### Chapter 71 - Cho Min-Ho

As if hypnotized, hundreds of thousands of living beings contemplated the newcomers gushing out one by one from a red cube higher than a skyscraper. The Red Cube, which until now had behaved like a mysterious, giant, multifaceted crystal, seemed to have liquefied, although it had retained its shape.

Newcomers were escaping from it like dolphins jumping out of the ocean. A first wave of aliens, animals and humanoids of all kinds came out of the cube, haggard and sheepish, with no apparent wounds on their bodies. Yet the experience seemed to have traumatized them forever. They were the ones who had failed and there were nearly thirty thousand of them.

Then, after a short interruption, a second influx of newcomers materialized. Those who had human appearances, or at least faces with recognisable expressions, were not as ashamed as the first ones. There were also all kinds of animals and aliens among them.

The animals in particular were larger than their counterparts in the previous crowd. Generally speaking, all of them were mentally exhausted, but they seemed more seasoned, stronger, and mostly satisfied. This group was the largest, numbering over one hundred thousand individuals.

At last, after another interruption, a third and final wave of people came out of the Red Cube. Compared to the previous groups, their

eyes were proud and their faces serene. They all looked like they had something different from the previous groups. Obviously, they were the few who had shone brightly during this First Ordeal. Humans, aliens and animals included, they were less than a thousand.

Among the latter group, Jake saw a few humans but also, to his horror, three humanoid aliens like the one that had chased the leaders of the mercenary gang. Looking more closely at the previous groups, he found none of these creatures among them. This alien species seemed to be cut out to win.

After the Red Cube had expelled all of the survivors into its bosom, it began to slowly flash again at the rate of a heartbeat. Meanwhile, each species in the different groups joined their own, with the three waves of participants blending together to form a large number of factions similar to those outside waiting their turn.

Among the humans in the third wave, Jake recognized three Earthmen. He was almost certain of his inference from the typical Earth clothing they wore, as some of the brands could not be mistaken.

The three humans were Asian, with a frail, extremely handsome young man, accompanied by another man and woman who stood close to him as bodyguards would. In fact, he didn't need to question their identities any longer, since Amy did it for him.

‘It's, it's Cho Min-ho!’ Amy gasped in amazement as she recognized the handsome guy in the distance.

‘What?!’ Sarah and Sophie echoed at the same time, with a startle.

‘Who?’ Jake and Kyle yawned, not the least bit interested.

‘Cho Min-Ho, a Korean star who’s starred in several famous dramas in recent years.’ Amy patiently explained with stars in her eyes. ‘I’m one of his biggest fans!’

‘Oh...’

Jake didn’t give a damn, to be honest. The only thing he cared about this person was that he had obviously done very well on his First Ordeal, despite his androgynous cowardly physique. With a bit of make-up, a dress and a wig, he could have passed for a woman.

In view of the bodyguards accompanying him, it did not seem impossible to cooperate with others to increase his chances of success. Nevertheless, this was pure speculation, and it was quite possible that their appearance side by side was merely coincidence.

Jake wouldn’t underestimate someone based on their looks.

Especially in a world where a few points of Aether could completely transform a person via a good middle finger to the laws of physics.

To Jake’s great surprise, the majority of humans, including a few who were definitely not of Earth origin, gathered around him, some of them even kneeling before him. Like a good and benevolent king, this Cho Min-Ho quickly helped them to their feet, before welcoming them with a big smile.

The members of the first two waves also seemed to bond with the few conquerors who had just come out of the Red Cube. The same pattern was found with every species, alien or animal.

Once the new factions were formed, the new arrivals departed in different directions, each time heading for an Oracle city. The Red Cube was probably placed in the middle of four of them, themselves separated from four others by about two hundred kilometers.

The newly-formed Cho-Min-Ho's faction did not immediately set off. Instead, they walked in their direction, or more precisely, towards the humans waiting to enter the Red Cube, of which Jake was a part. Once they were a few yards away and positioned between the three surviving factions of that bloody night, they halted.

Cho Min-Ho advanced elegantly, followed closely by his two bodyguards, allowing everyone to get a closer look at him.

That Cho Min-Ho had the typical look of a K-pop star. Handsome, trending mid-length haircut, wearing a comfortable branded street outfit. He had pale fair skin like a young girl's and hypnotic green eyes. His friendly face and smile had something angelic about it, but instead awakened Jake's suspicious instincts.

From what Amy whispered to him with hearts in her eyes, he was the heir of one of the largest Korean upper-class families and already managed with an iron fist the many assets of his parents' commercial empire. He was apparently also known for his frail health and repeated absences during filming and press conferences for health reasons. Some said he had congenital heart disease, others that he suffered from severe asthma, or even cystic fibrosis. No one really knew the truth.

His two bodyguards had nothing to do with the usual bulldogs in suits that most politicians and celebrities used to escort. The bodyguard to his left was a tall man, over 1.9 meters tall, in his forties, with a slender but firm body reminiscent of a leopard. There wasn't a single ounce of excess fat.

He wore a black special forces commando outfit with a bullet-proof vest, and all the gear that went with it, except for an assault rifle and other explosives. His weapons consisted of a gun, a long knife and a baton. He also had fairly dark skin, a sign of long exposure to the

sun, and black hair plated back with lacquer. That he could and wanted to comb his hair this way on planet B842 was a mystery in itself.

His expression was extremely focused and alert, clearly showing that the safety of this Cho Min-Ho was his priority. Nevertheless, Jake could detect in this person a certain smugness, often found in people of power. In comparison, the client they were defending was much more subtle and reserved.

Tvu luhmrt gmtwepfzt jfl film ar vuz dpil Snuhafi Fmzhul pradmzq. Aiovmpev lvu jfl hfzware f epr frt f cradu iacu ovu nzuSampl epfzt, lvu film jmzu f cfofrf mr vuz guio, f laer ovfo lvu jfl nzfhoahare f Kurtm ownu qfzoafi fzo fo f vaev iusui.

Physically, she was a rather attractive woman of about thirty years old with a slender body and features and a small chest. She stared at them with a cold and stern look, including her client. Her long black hair down to her shoulders tied in a ponytail and her minimalist make-up contrasted with her co-worker's impeccable hairstyle.

Believing that he had got their attention, Cho Min-Ho began to speak in a soft but resonant voice, betraying that he was a regular at public speeches. His body language was controlled and natural.

‘My presence among you is motivated by two things.’ He declared, while marking a time of silence. ‘The first is to increase the chances of success of my fellow citizens in this First Ordeal in which you will soon participate. I will answer any questions you may have.’

Many murmurs began to buzz through the crowd of humans gathered in front of him. Some seemed eager to speak and ask

questions. The Korean celebrity, however, did not let them do so, and beckoned them to calm down.

‘I’ll answer all your questions. I have plenty of time.’ Cho Min-ho reassured them with a kind smile. ‘The other reason is that I’m recruiting.’

A new wave of whispers echoed among the humans listening to him, trying to find out what his true intentions were. They had all seen how members of the outlaw group were treated, especially women and children. Putting his life into the hands of a more powerful group they knew nothing about could easily backfire on them.

The non-Earth human and humanoid factions occasionally had their own speakers, but not always. The faction of nobles and knights to which Enya belonged could only watch in frustration as other humans were getting information, while they were doomed to remain ignorant.

Even with all their erudition and talent for magic, they could not understand a new language in such a short time. One of the nobles with hair as translucent as fiber optics could read people’s thoughts, emotions and memories.

Even without the knowledge of the language, he could understand the intention of the message. A skill he used in his home world to tame animals or extract information from victims against or with their consent, which could also lobotomize and manipulate.

Bpo guhfplu ovu Auovuz mr oval nifruo jfl arfhullagiu om ovuq, vu vft rm jfw om zuruj val qfeah. Ulare jvfo iaooiu Mfrf vu vft om eiufv lmqu ardmzqfoamr ovfo qaevo rmo gu pludpi jfl omm zalcw.

As a result, the nobles stayed away and champed at the bit.