

The Oracle Paths

Volume 3: The Oracle Cities

Chapter 168 – She conned Herself

‘That’s all well and good, but all the more reason not to do it right away. ‘Jake flatly refused his cousin’s proposal. ‘Many may just want to get through the First Ordeals as quickly as possible, but I intend to do them with flying colours. ‘

‘Ditto.’ Will added resolutely. ‘These Ordeals are nothing urgent at the moment and what I need most right now is Aether to pump up my stats and start my business. ‘

Anya still tried for a few minutes after that to convince him, repeating several times that neither the power nor the stats of the Player were important for this Ordeal. Obviously, she could not describe the Ordeal in detail, the Oracle forbade it.

She couldn’t even tell whether it was a survival test requiring fighting or a battle of wits focusing on brainpower. In the end, apart from the fact that the Ordeal was short, he didn’t get any concrete information. Besides...

‘Anya, stop. ‘Jake cut short her attempts to convince him. ‘Even if I was ten times stronger than I am today, there’s no way I’d do this Ordeal under the watchful eye of the Government. What’s in it for me besides tattooing a target on my back? Family honor? I don’t give a damn about it. ‘

‘Ugh... ‘Anya grew pale when she heard his answer, even though she expected it. ‘There are advantages if you perform well and the government will notice you...‘

‘Like what?’ Jake retorted sarcastically. ‘Getting hired as a recruit without an interview? Or having my actions monitored? Or that everyone who has access to my information knows exactly if I’m stronger or weaker than they are so they can conspire behind my back? No need to even think about it. My answer is no. ‘

‘And where will you take your Ordeal in this case? We can do this in family, if it’s the government that’s bothering you. ‘Anya tried one last time.

‘ Even less. Apart from you and Uncle Kalen, I don’t care about anyone else. No offense, Charles, but it’s the truth. ‘

‘None taken. ‘Charles replied with a guilty smirk. If he were in Jake’s shoes, he probably would have reacted the same way.

‘What if I give you a proper reward to motivate you?’ His cousin regained her energy as she tried a new idea.

‘Below 10,000 Aether points, it’s not even worth mentioning. ‘Jake said with a shark-like expression saying he wouldn’t go any lower.

Anya, who thought she’d found enough of a carrot to soften him up, slumped down on the table, taking her head in her hands as she received his answer. She was totally discouraged now.

Although the government was giving them enough Aether to pay for a few coffees, most of her savings came from the Ordeals and a few missions on B842. After maxing out her stats and buying a few Aether Skills, she didn’t have that much Aether.

‘ Stubborn... you’ll see. Don’t forget what you just said. ‘ Anya muttered, waving at Charles to get up.

Jake raised a baffled eyebrow as he pondered her last statement, but he quickly put it aside in a corner of his head. If his cousin was stupid enough to give him 10,000 Aether points, who was he to refuse. By the way, he had only talked about a minimum. 10,000 points was for the right to negotiate with him.

Will gave Jake a thumbs-up, hailing his masterstroke. Until now, he had viewed Jake as a smart, ruthless person, but not so ruthless that he would swindle his own cousin. If Jake could read his mind, he would have said she had conned herself. He hadn’t done anything.

‘You’re leaving already?’ Jake exclaimed with a slight surprise.

‘ Well, sadly, yes, my dear cousin. We’re still on duty... ‘ Charles explained in an apologetic tone. ‘ Anya simply insisted on coming for you as soon as she was able to detect you again. Otherwise, I’d still be in my lab dissecting a Digestor corpse... I’m wearing soldier’s armor, but since I joined New Earth I haven’t set foot outside a Shelter even once. ‘

This was more in keeping with the character Jake remembered. His job, on the other hand, seemed to have changed quite a bit.

‘Didn’t you used to work in aerospace?’ He asked curiously.

Charles’ face lit up when he heard the word aerospace.

‘Times are changing, I’ve had to retrain! But my work hasn’t changed much, except that I’ve had to take up biology a bit. These Digestors are fascinating creatures. Did you know, for example, that the eyeball of a Digestor above Rank 4 can replace rubies as a solid-state amplifying medium in military lasers?’

‘No, and I don’t care. ‘Jake answered curtly. If he didn’t stand firm, he risked being drawn into a never-ending argument.

Feeling the risk, Anya grabbed the mad scientist cousin by the arm, forcing him to follow her. Once she was sure that Charles would not engage in a long and passionate speech, she gave Jake one last hug before bidding him farewell.

‘Don’t take unnecessary risks Jake! Wait till I get back. It should only take a few days. ‘His cousin reminded him in a warning tone.

‘Don’t worry, I’m the cautious type, you know me. ‘Jake responded with a flawless poker face.

If she knew he was there looking for a mission and intended to get out of the Shelter right after, she probably would have knocked him out and forcibly brought him back with her. Knowing her, it was better to drop a little lie.

Alima and Patrick stayed with Jake and Will, since they were presently off duty until the next day. They had already reported the arrival of Earth survivors in this Oracle Shelter to their superior and Anya was going back to Thelma to make her own report.

Their mission was thus already over, since Cho Min-Ho had agreed to collaborate with New Earth. Each new earthling arriving in this Shelter would first go through the Coreen faction.

No one was fooled. Both soldiers knew that Cho Min-Ho would use this opportunity to recruit as many survivors as possible, but the government didn’t care as long as he obeyed orders and collaborated when asked.

The Earth Government had a lot of cohesiveness concerns and strong internal tensions, but it still had nothing to fear from new

emerging factions like these. No matter how talented a Player was, the Government elites had had twenty years to prepare themselves.

This was also one of the reasons why they had been so willing to keep it a secret. To ensure that their new government would always be strong enough to command respect. Naturally, it hadn't worked out exactly as they wanted it to, as multiple veteran Players and Evolvers were breaking with New Earth more and more.

Waov ovu vuin md ovu ojm lmitauzl, Jfcu frt Waii qftu ovuaz jfw om ovu Ozfhiu Mallamr Hfii. Tvu foqmlnvuzu jfl qphv qmzu quofiah frt prhipoouzut ar oval luhoamr, fl mru jmpit uknuho dzmq ovu fzhvaouhopzfi frt tuhmzfoasu lurlu md ovu Ozfhiu. Esuzwovare jfl hmit frt dprhoamrfi, jaov ardmzqfoamr ouzqarfil frt tzmrul uSuzwvuzuz, fl fijfwl.

The hall was not empty, though. Some of the terminals and drones were occupied by various aliens of all kinds. A disgusting human-sized batracian was trying to catch one of the drones with its tongue like a toad swallows bugs, but the drone just dodged lazily as it continued to give out incomprehensible croaks.

Jake didn't know if the alien could understand anything, but it seemed to work, as a few minutes later the batrachian went off on all six legs with a satisfied look on its face, not to mention drooling on the sparkling tile floor.

While inspecting the area, Jake recognized a few people, including one of Cho Min-Ho's bodyguards, whom he decided to ignore completely. He also recognized, since fate seemed to want their paths to cross, Enya, accompanied by the other woman with pink hair resembling her. For once, she had no guards with her and was absorbed by the terminal in front of her. The two noblewomen looked pretty stressed out.

At last Jake and Will found Sarah a little further away, communicating orally with one of the Oracle drones in search of a mission within her reach. Apparently, Jake and Will weren't the only ones unable to stay put.
