

The Oracle Paths

Volume 4: The Purgatory

Chapter 358 - Embassy

The arrival of Jake and Will delighted their companions, but there was one person among them who looked dull and didn't dare look them in the eye: Kyle.

Jake was about to grab a chair when the others stood up to greet them directly.

"No need to sit down, we were waiting for you to get out of here." Sarah merrily exclaimed, not hiding her relief at leaving this place.

As Jake looked at Enya and her sister's expression, he realized that they too were uncomfortable in this cafeteria and clearly upset. The few soldiers sitting at other tables were staring at them with taciturn faces and the atmosphere seemed rather tense.

"I missed something?" Jake questioned them, smelling gunpowder in the air, ready to explode any second.

Sarah hugged his arm without speaking a word instead of giving him an answer and began to gently guide him to the exit as if they were an old couple. Enya and Esya made a strange face when they saw the boldness of the young woman, but they were reluctant to make the slightest remark. Instead, it was Kyle who clenched his fists in futile anger before sighing with a defeated expression.

Jake wasn't comfortable with Sarah's intimate behavior, but he was used to her outgoing nature. Knowing that this was not the place to make a fuss, he let himself be led outside with the rest of his group on his heels.

Once outside, he freed his arm from the young blonde's embrace and unabashedly asked what was going on.

"Several officers have tried to recruit us since our arrival and each time we have declined." Tim boasted proudly as if he had accomplished a great feat.

Jake patted his head to congratulate him but inside he was rather concerned.

"I guess they didn't just ask politely?" Will inquired without hiding his dismay.

He had long anticipated this situation. It was Sarah who summed up the course of events in a few short sentences.

"The first officer was an army colonel from the Earth Government. She was a polite woman and she left immediately after our refusal, giving us her name so that we could easily contact her and an address in case we changed our mind."

"The next one was a former Air Force captain with an Eastern European accent. Very polite too. A third colonel also tried to recruit us, but he felt we were getting impatient and did not insist... "

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"Stop! "Jake interrupted her suddenly. If he listened to this any longer, he might fall asleep. "They didn't threaten you or put any pressure on you?"

"They did," Esya confirmed immediately with an outraged pout.

"Kyle? "Jake turned to the Playboy to ask the opinion of the only person who had no désiré to talk about anything.

The young man rudely raised his head and, realizing that Jake was talking to him, he explained the situation clearly in a few words before wallowing again in a dejected silence.

With Kyle's concise report, Jake and Will finally had a good understanding of the events.

Apparently, several reputable officers had indeed tried to recruit them after learning of their performances during the Second Ordeal. News about B842 spread quickly and New Earth could afford to buy the Ordeal filmed reports that some participants or military personnel were willing to sell them.

Ruby having survived almost to the very end and being part of the military, they knew exactly what score these participants had and how long they had survived. To enter this fortified base, they had to identify themselves by showing an ID card or simply by announcing their first and last name. With the Shadow Guide or a dedicated Oracle Skill it was relatively simple to determine if someone was lying.

After these soldiers tried to recruit them in vain, other uniformed individuals approached them with tempting offers, this time of a financial or more dubious nature. Sarah and the others realized that not all the soldiers on this base served the government and had their own factions.

Hearing their misadventures, Jake was speechless. If a simple break in a cafeteria from this base was so hectic, one had to wonder why they chose this meeting place. If it was him, he would never have set foot here. It was really like looking for a stick to get beaten up.

"Keep it down! "Will whispered as he noticed that the young women's complaints had drawn attention to them from the military nearby.

They weren't the only Earth Evolvers to come here and fortunately for them the base was quite crowded, but it was still better to be discreet.

Jake, not wanting to be seen, finally said, "What are we doing here?"

"We're here to buy our Floating Islands and start our faction, of course. What else could we do? "Will revealed as he clapped his hands impatiently. "Follow me."

Without waiting for them, he walked towards the largest building of this fortified base, beckoning them to follow him. Sarah and the others had already been briefed, but Jake was seriously annoyed to be left in the dark like this.

The largest building in this tiny base serving as Earth's embassy was a tin building appearing to have been hastily assembled by stacking rectangular containers on top of each other. The resulting building was rather high, like a ten-storey tower, but ugly, yet functional.

Since violence was forbidden on Thelma, the Evolvers standing guard at the entrance did not bother to search them against their will, but memorized their faces after asking for their first and last names again.

Once inside, Jake understood why Will had come here. The inside did not look like a building from Earth, but one of those Oracle City Halls. It was bigger than it looked, the ground floor area far exceeding that of the entire base.

Seeing this, Jake and the others were flabbergasted. Who would have thought that Earth technology had advanced so much! But as they spotted numerous Oracle Drones floating lazily from one customer to another they realized that this was not the case.

The building just served as an access point and its builders were not custodians of this technology. Seeing that the place was quiet and that no one cared about them, Will finally explained in a low voice, taking great care to ensure that no outsiders were spying on their conversations.

"It doesn't cost much to enter Thelma's internal precinct directly, but you need special permission to do so. Every nation is allowed to set up an embassy like this for their transactions. Even Earth factions not affiliated with the Earth Government have no choice but to go here. If they are denied entry, they have no choice but to try their luck in another embassy.

"I see..." Jake whispered in amazement.

This reality was rather unfair to the lonely or ambitious Evolvers and Players. It forced them to maintain a certain dependency on their original civilization. Fortunately, the government was not too strict with them at the moment. After all, they had only finished two Ordeals.

This building contained several sections with different information terminals and specific teleporters leading to the different Oracle Buildings. From here it was possible to reach the Oracle Bunker, the Oracle Playground or any of the Thelma Halls.

Thanks to Will who had already checked the situation, they learnt that Thelma contained two additional structures compared to the other Oracle Cities: the Oracle Palace and the Senate.

Neither of these two places could be visited freely. The Oracle Palace was the home of the Oracle Overseer and the Oracle Guardians presiding over B842, while the Senate was rumored to be a strange cube where political leaders sometimes met when the Oracle Overseer wanted to announce something important to them.

The Oracle City deep in the heart of Thelma was divided into two areas, an outer-city accessible to the public where it was possible to buy a personal residence for the wealthiest Evolvers and the inner-city which was reserved for the personnel serving the Oracle. The old alien that Jake had met at the transportation tower stayed here when he was done with his shift.

The reason they had to go through one of these embassies to create their own Faction was that they had to contact the Oracle Palace to do so. Since no Evolver could enter freely, they had to use another means. This building was used for that purpose.

In one of the rooms, several terminals used to contact the Oracle Palace had been installed by the Oracle Drones. Whenever someone wanted to create their own faction, get their own Floating Island, or get special permission to visit Thelma, it was through this interface that they had to navigate.

It was a bit like the hotlines of the telephone or internet operators. It was voluntarily restrictive to dissuade all those who didn't have something really important to do or say from disturbing them.

Jake opened one of these interfaces to contact the Oracle Palace on Will' pressing instructions and issued his request with the help of Xi acting as a go-between. They then waited breathlessly for an answer.

This was the most important moment. Some Players and Evolvers had apparently been ignored in the past, while others had been turned down before they could even make their request. At least the fact that they had not been turned down immediately was a good sign.

After a moment, a mental interface popped up in his mind and the hologram of an alien wearing a strange uniform appeared before their eyes. At the same time, a force field isolating their conversation was erected around them by three Oracle Drones forming a triangular formation above them.

The appearance of the hologram was that of an attractive young woman wearing a long silver dress, but her skin color was candy pink and her hair was a bright orange Iroquois cut. Definitely not an earth woman.

"Agent Keru at your service, what can I do for you?"

"I'm here to start my own faction and get my own Floating Island. "Jake repeated his request while being distracted and bewildered by her strange skin color. It took a nudge from Sarah to get him back to his senses.

"Have you decided on the name of your faction? "The alien replied kindly, glancing at the rest of his group one by one as if it was obvious that this decision had to be agreed upon unanimously.

Jake sounded out Will and the others but facing their silence, he decided to propose a name of his own. Clear and concise, straight to the point, that was his style.

"What about Jake's Faction? "He said with sincerity, smiling at the hologram.

BAM!

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