

# The Oracle Paths

## Volume 4: The Purgatory

### Chapter 354 - It's A Small World

"How do you feel?" Jake inquired with a concerned look on his face. "Can you still connect to the Oracle System?"

Jake may have known in broad outline what this will fragment was capable of, but he could only use it as a conductor. He didn't understand in detail how this energy worked to achieve the desired result.

"Apart from the fact that our minds are more closely linked, I feel the same as before. "Xi answered hesitantly as she inspected her consciousness and the code she had access to. "I can still connect to the Oracle System, but I can now decide what feedback I send to it."

Jake relaxed visibly upon receiving this confirmation. This was his original intention. If Xi had been completely disconnected from the Oracle System, the Oracle System would have been alerted immediately.

In order to fool the algorithm governing the Oracle System, the Oracle System was not to detect the slightest anomaly or discrepancy. Data feedback from Xi and his Oracle Device had to remain constant and consistent with the present situation under all circumstances.

With the energy levels and the amount of liquid alloy contained in his Oracle Device, Xi had more than enough computing power to generate false information. Right now, from the Oracle System's perspective, Xi was silently observing Jake meditating in his booth.

The subtlety would be when they went outside and crossed paths with other Evolvers. At that point, they could not afford to falsify any information about Jake.

If the feedback from Xi indicated that Jake was asleep and he was sighted by another Evolver strolling around town, the discrepancy between the two would trigger an alert, followed by a rapid investigation by the Oracle System.

So, in order for their relationship to go smoothly, Jake and Xi had decided not to change their habits. The feedback would remain faithful to the current situation except for their conversations, which Xi would falsify when it touched on a sensitive or blasphemous subject.

Xion Zolvhur's will fragment had warned him that as long as the link between Xi and the Oracle System existed, it was impossible to completely escape the Oracle's surveillance.

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Above all, they would have to be wary of the updates following the increase in Oracle Rank. In addition to increasing the energy levels, an update of the bracelet and Oracle AI was done very discreetly to raise their authority level. This involved unlocking the memories contained by Xi's consciousness, but also sometimes more in-depth adaptations.

Occasionally, during a global threat, for example if the Oracle System itself had been compromised or many Oracle AIs had been reported defective, all the AIs in a given world could be thoroughly examined or even purged preventively.

Of course, these extreme situations were absolutely rare and almost never occurred. The Ancient Designer had revealed all this to Jake, not to scare him, but to remind him that the best way to fool the Oracle System was not to draw unnecessary attention to them.

Because after this procedure, the energy remaining in the fragment was just enough to intercept one or two more rigorous inspections by the Oracle staff. If an Oracle Overseer decided to personally check his bracelet, this tiny amount of energy was absolutely insufficient to withstand the investigation.

In such a catastrophic case, Jake's only recourse would be to completely reformat Xi by completely falsifying her memories. She would then be dead. Moreover, the position tracker contained in each Oracle Device was not under the control of the Oracle AI.

In truth, Xi was unable to hide Jake's true location. Sending contradictory feedback would negate all their efforts. Nevertheless, the energy contained by the fragment was still enough to fake Jake's location for three hours.

Jake and Xi then talked telepathically for a few minutes, probing their respective emotions and reactions. For Xi it made no difference, but for Jake it was a relatively new experience. In particular, he found that the Oracle AI's mind was still much more complex than his own.

The colossal computational power and knowledge contained in her consciousness was not something Jake could understand at his level. He absolutely needed her to operate the Oracle Device.

Soon they found common ground and promised each other that they would not spy on each other's thoughts without consent. Xi was uncomfortable anyway and unable to talk normally when she felt spied on.

Like many people she was a voyeurist, but not an exhibitionist. When she was the only one who could read Jake's thoughts, she never realized how problematic it could be once she was subjected to the same treatment.

However, they could still read their surface emotions. If Xi in particular ever tried to betray him, he would be informed immediately. The will fragment from the Ancient Designer was there anyway to alert Jake if such a scenario occurred, although highly unlikely.

Once this problem was resolved, Jake felt incredibly light and contented. For the first time in his life, he could trust someone. For someone like him who was lonely and suspicious by nature, this was definitely a major change.

"What are you going to do now?" Xi asked softly, holding back with great difficulty to spy on his mind. The bad habits were tenacious.

Jake's eyebrows knotted in an intense thinking effort, but soon his face relaxed and he smiled brightly. He had a lot of things to do, but today he wanted to relax and reward himself for his first place. He deserved at least that.

"I intend to live like a normal earthling today."

"Oh..." Xi uttered before losing interest in him. Her hologram dissipated quickly after.

He tried to detect his cat again with his Shadow Guide, but to no avail. The Pet Contract was still active, so the most likely theory was that he was participating in an Ordeal somewhere.

He was also tempted to go to Ruby to ask her for an explanation or go back to his family's mansion, but either way it would put an end to his good mood.

Alas, things never turned out the way he wanted them to. No sooner did he open the door of his cabin than he came face to face again with Yerode and Lamine, the two criminal mercenaries and rapists who had tried to kill him on several occasions.

Their cabins were indeed next to each other thanks to an implausible coincidence, or rather the Oracle's evil plan to maintain a rivalry and stimulate them, but the probability of meeting them right after his return was still pretty low... What kind of shitty luck was this?

The two men were accompanied by two young women dressed in rags and with desperate faces. He had already met the first woman before, but the second one was new. Her long sky blue hair and slit pupils betrayed that she was not of Earth origin either.

In both cases, the skin on their lewdly exposed legs and arms was covered with disgusting bruises and hickeys. In some places, their skin had been scarified, including their backs, as if someone had been whipping them.

When Jake noticed them, he saw red and his breathing suddenly sped up, the irrepressible urge to smash them on the spot suffocating his whole being. His plans for relaxation and enjoyment had been completely thwarted in a corner of his head.

[ Calm down Jake, this isn't the time.] Xi warned him as she felt his killing intent intensify dangerously.

"I know..." Jake grunted, biting his lip to the blood to hold his nerve.

If Jake could see them, naturally the two mercenaries had noticed him too. In that moment, they got goose bumps when they spotted a giant muscular man staring at them with a hateful, bloodthirsty, murderous gaze.

They blinked incomprehendingly several times, their bodies momentarily frozen in stupor before slowly regaining their composure. After a few seconds, they realized that this face was kinda familiar, and then their eyes widened as they recognized him, followed by a sardonic burst of laughter.

It was their only option to cope with their uneasiness. The last time they had seen him, Jake had just gotten his knees blown out by one of Lamine's sniper's bullets and been left to die in the dust with a horde of Digestors on his tail. He should have been dead. They were so certain of it that they had not even bothered to check if he had survived...

"Jake, how are you? It's a small world..." Yerode chuckled while hugging his new slave, his hand vulgarly kneading one of her breasts as if it were bread dough. It was clearly painful, but the young woman remained silent although the shame and humiliation could be clearly seen in her eyes.

Spznzaloreiw, mrhu Jfcu zufiaxut ovfo ovu quzhurfzw jfl ozware om tzasu vaq hzfxw om hmqqao fr przutuuqfgiu fho, val freuz arlofroiw efsu jfw frt f luzuru, gpo ahw dfhu zunifhut ao.

This was not good news, by any means, however. It was the deceptive calm contained within the eye of a hurricane. Beneath this detached surface, a storm of negative emotions raged violently.

Yerode and Lamine could display such confidence because they had successfully completed their third Ordeal. Their performance wasn't as outstanding as Jake's second Ordeal, but they were still veterans of the battlefield. They had come through a difficult childhood and suffered all kinds of abuse before they became the monsters they were today.

Yerode, the Ethiopian mercenary, in particular, had experienced famine, thirst, war and worse. Compared to the average Earthling, they were perfectly prepared to face this new world and its trials. Their performances during their first three Ordeals had easily placed in the top 5% each time.

However, Jake could tell at a glance that their appearance hadn't changed that much. They were a little taller and their muscles had developed to their limit, but it was still the physique that a human being on earth could achieve by taking a few doping products. This was not the kind of miraculous transformation that a high grade bloodline could cause.

Even by underestimating their Ordeals' rating, these two enemies could not be that weak. And yet, it didn't matter. He could always greet them in his own way...

"Indeed the world is small..." Jake finally said coldly. "But if my memories serve me right, we weren't on such good terms the last time we saw each other. Shouldn't you... be on your knees?"

Yerode and Lamine immediately changed their expression as they recollected the horrendous experience that had haunted their nightmares for several weeks. More experienced, stronger and not as ignorant as before, they raised their guard and mobilized their Blue, Indigo and Violet Aether to resist the enemy's control. Their Spirit Body formed a rudimentary defense to shield their nervous system from Jake's control.

But Jake had already anticipated such a twist. After his misadventures, he was no longer naive enough to deploy his Spirit Body without considering all his options. Instead, a telekinetic force field with incredible pressure materialized above their heads, forcing them to bow their heads.

Even though Jake was not quite willing to personally test their Spirit Bodies, there was nothing to stop him from attacking them from a distance. To his surprise, Yerode and Lamine, who had been so weak in their previous encounter, did not instantly fall to their knees. With their faces and muscles red and congested, they were still standing, resisting this crushing pressure with all their strength and roaring indignantly.

"Stop it right now, you bastard son of a bitch! We'll find your mother and your sister and your whole family and we'll kill them as soon as we get out of here..."

Jake's lip twitched at the insults and threats, but a carnivorous smile revealing his long translucent fangs appeared soon after and the pressure on them instantly doubled to silence them.

Meanwhile, the two slaves stood stiff and motionless like stakes with a blissful expression on their faces. Who would have thought that the backlash would come so quickly!

The two bullies were now bullied themselves by an even greater bully.